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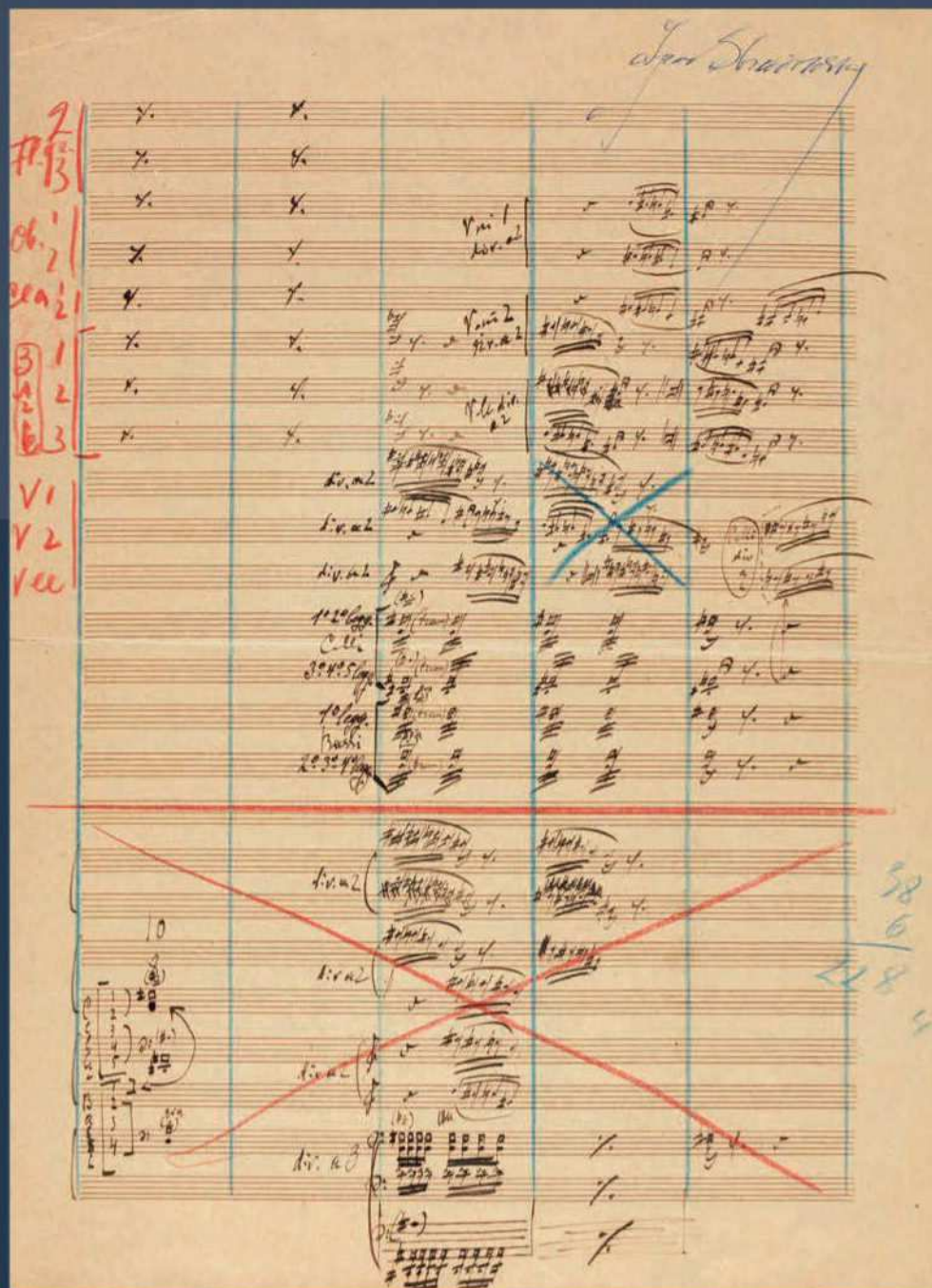
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GRAMOPHONE

SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Baxter

'Ask the Moon'

April Twilight^a. Four Views of Love^b.

Grandmother, think not I forget^c. Is this the cost?^d. Nights Without Sleep^b. Skywriting^c. Three Madrigals^c. Three Poems from Edna St Vincent Millay^c. Two Last Songs^e

^{ae}Annie Gill, ^dKatherine Keem, ^cJessica Satava

^{sops}^bPeter Scott Drackley ^{ten}^aMelissa

Wertheimer ^{fl} Andrew Stewart ^{pf}

Navona © NV6133 (51' • DDD • T)



There are many lovely things on this recording of songs by Garth Baxter about loss and

memory, and of marrying words to music. Most are sad, and the composer's idiom is simple, straightforward, old-fashioned romantic, but in each Baxter's ear for matching the rhythm and sense of the verse quickly allows him to identify the central point of emotional interest at which his inspiration and the singer's art intersect.

At the smaller end of the scale Baxter's setting of Sara Teasdale's exquisite *Nights Without Sleep*, with its ending line 'my life will live on in music after me', gives tenor Peter Scott Drackley, who sings with remarkably clear diction, an opportunity to be full-throated and ardent before giving way to 40 seconds of a gorgeous piano coda. Baxter does again and even more effectively at the end of 'Let it be forgotten'. The most poignant is 'Is this the cost?' from his opera *Lily*, sung beautifully by Baxter's wife Katherine Keem.

The best is the longest, 'Grandmother, think not I forget', a sweet love song set to a text Baxter co-wrote with his wife, drawing forth from Jessica Satava her best work, at times unforgettably. There is also clear, bright singing from Annie Gill in two songs set to poems by Linda Pastan and Christina Rossetti. And throughout, Andrew Stewart at the piano is a singer's dream.

The songs were recorded between 2013 and 2017 at different venues in and around Baltimore and yet the sound always seems consistent and true. Brief notes and complete texts are provided. **Laurence Vittes**

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Orlando Cela

The Venezuelan-born flautist talks about playing new music and a growing repertoire



Do you see expanding the flute repertoire as one of your missions?

Yes, I do. I think every musician should do this. This is the second album for which I had requested works for flute that use 'no normal sounds'. The Minakakis and Dulaney pieces arose separately from this challenge but were still written for me; they really set a new standard of composition for the flute.

These works employ various extended techniques, which must be challenging.

Yes, every technique has its own unique challenge. Minakakis's multiphonics had to be perfectly tuned to the piano resonance while remaining extremely quiet; Dulaney demands smooth transitions between various techniques; Robert Gross's work required going to my limits, especially vocally; and Dana Kaufman's 'Hang Down Your Head' made me explore throat-singing and playing at the same time, which took some time to master! But the true challenge

is using these techniques to achieve the intended expressive purpose.

Were any of these techniques new to you?

Not completely new, although they are employed in different ways and in different combinations. And I must say, the variety of new notations the composers used to convey these techniques amazed me.

Had you worked with any of these composers before?

I have known Maxwell Dulaney for a long time, and Stratis Minakakis for a few years. Dulaney is an extraordinary composer, in that he can play anything he writes, on whatever instrument, so is able to demonstrate his seemingly impossible ideas. We have worked closely together for many years, and he is keen to explore the limits of what is playable.

Corrette

Six Sonatas for Harpsichord and Violin, Op 25

Paul Luchkow ^{vn} Michael Jarvis ^{hpd}

Marquis © MAR81475 (74' • DDD)



While Michel Corrette's methods and writings rank alongside those by Geminiani, CPE Bach, Quantz and Tartini, fate has been less kind to his music; besides scholars, he may be best known only to cellists (and enterprising bassoonists) for whom he wrote a cello quartet and a sonata called *Les délices de la solitude*. Enter

Canadians Paul Luchkow and Michael Jarvis to enlarge our knowledge.

Written in 1742 to please the exquisite tastes of Louis XV's court, with the pastoral adventures of Marie Antoinette as their aesthetic backdrop, Corrette's six *Sonates pour le clavecin avec un accompagnement de violon* represented a charming update to the Baroque trio sonata. Although the title assigns a secondary role to the violin, and the harpsichord's part stands on its own, the violin adds a variety of thrilling colouristic textures and popular devices including the occasional drone of a hurdy-gurdy. And while each of the six violin sonatas has its own colourful title, the most splendid musically is the Sixth, a very un-Joycean



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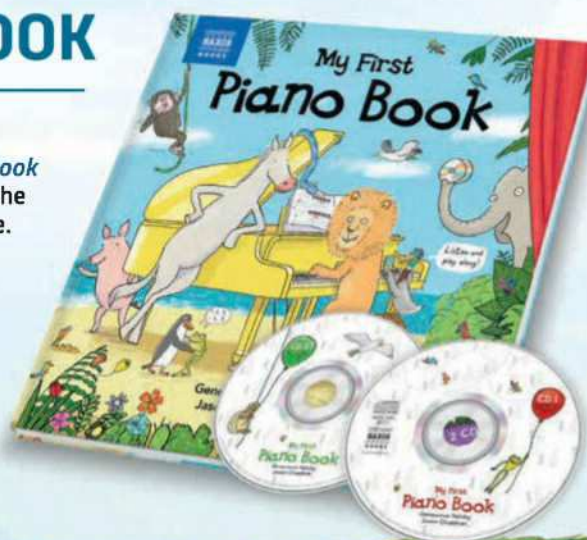


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Concentration and creativity: Benjamin Goodman champions the music of Sara Feigin

Les voyages d'Ulysse with a slow movement of remarkable invention and beauty.

Luchkow and Jarvis apply the polished elegance the court would have expected with the relaxed intimacy that would have heightened the musical pleasure in a recording that suggests the music's more private destinations. Playing a half-step low at A=415 gives them the space to address the charm and grace of the music, and to highlight the occasional high energy. Each rises to the occasion when short runs, brilliant trills and other feints at virtuosity are required. **Laurence Vittes**

Feigin

Four Scenes. Piano Sonata.
Toccata. Two Pieces. Variations
Benjamin Goodman *pf*
Navona © NV6147 (47' • DDD)



Sara Feigin (1928–2011) pursued a multifaceted career as pianist, composer and educator, first in her native Latvia and subsequently in Israel, where she migrated with her family. After graduating from the Riga Conservatory in 1954, Feigin served as composer and musical consultant at that city's Choreographical Institute and Opera. Once her family settled in Israel in 1972, Feigin's interest in pedagogy blossomed

and she began to conduct music education workshops, write teaching methods and present concerts. The current release focuses on her solo piano music and mostly includes either unperformed or previously unrecorded works, many based on traditional folk songs.

The opening 'Two Pieces, 'Prelude' and 'Storm', take their cue from the late Russian Romanticism playbook, while the *Four Scenes* are leaner and more stylistically eclectic. The 1982 Variations are introduced by a wistful minor-key theme that returns as a finale in the major mode. In between are nine variations with distinct and unpredictable characters. The slower variations seem more original and heartfelt than the relatively facile faster movements. Out of the 1972 Sonata's four movements, the Scherzo's scampering high-register passages and the slow movement's stark, brooding outer sections stand out.

Feigin's concentration and creativity come together strongest in the 1972 Toccata. The work's folk-song roots take on an acerbic tinge as the music darts back and forth between rapid lines packed with repeated notes, chordal outbursts and gnarly climactic writing in the outer registers. The performer is hard-pressed to keep all of these elements afloat and moving but Feigin kindly provides a few (but only a few) oases of lyrical respite. The young British-born, Israeli-based pianist Benjamin Goodman turns in solid and polished performances. One could imagine

more dynamic contrast and colour but that's probably due to the slightly constricted recording. It would be interesting to hear what Feigin's early ballet scores and more recent orchestral works sound like, but that's for another review. **Jed Distler**

Ranjbaran • Ticheli • Warnaar

'Wind Concertos'

Ranjbaran Flute Concerto^a Ticheli Clarinet Concerto^b Warnaar Horn Concerto^c

^aErik Gratton *fl* ^bJames Zimmermann *cl* ^cLeslie Norton *hn* Nashville Symphony Orchestra /
Giancarlo Guerrero

Naxos American Classics © 8 559818 (65' • DDD)



As 21st-century wind concertos go, this is as entertaining as it gets. I have not encountered

the music of Frank Ticheli (b1958), Brad Warnaar (b1950) or Behzad Ranjbaran (b1955) before but on the evidence of these straightforward yet superbly constructed pieces I definitely want to hear more. Ticheli's Clarinet Concerto is a triptych of homages to three of the most familiar American composers: Gershwin (alluding to *Rhapsody in Blue*'s wonderful clarinet flourish at the outset), Copland – composer of a marvellous Clarinet Concerto of his own – and Bernstein, with more than a whiff of *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs*. Ticheli's music is

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all his own, so it is a little startling when a hint of *Rhapsody in Blue* heaves back into view later on. James Zimmermann gives a fluent, eye-widening account of the virtuoso solo part but is equally at home with the gentle lines of the central 'Song for Aaron'.

Leslie Norton is no less adept in Brad Warnaar's ear-catching Horn Concerto (2015), the most succinct work at a mere 16 minutes. The (French) horn is Warnaar's own instrument and his idiomatic writing sings through every bar, never more so than in the final Tarantella, a whirl of allusions to Classical horn repertoire. However, it is Érik Gratton's breathtaking playing of the final work, Iranian-born Behzad Ranjbaran's evocative Flute Concerto (2013), that steals the show. While not over-playing the Persian-heritage card, Ranjbaran takes full advantage of it in a neatly integrated concerto of great appeal. The Nashville Symphony Orchestra and Giancarlo Guerrero accompany with real conviction in the fine acoustic of Laura Turner Concert Hall. Terrific sound from Gary Call and Tim Handley. Highly recommended.

Guy Rickards

Rossé

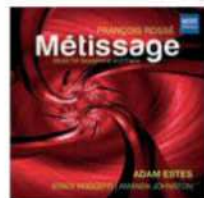
'Métissage'

Nishi Asakusa. Løbuk Constrictor. Saeodie - I; II. Jonction. La main dans le souffle. Sonates en arcs. Le Frêne égaré

Adam Estes sax

Stacy Rodgers, Amanda Johnston pf

MSR Classics © MS1644 (45' • DDD)



Adam Estes's tribute to Francois Rossé, who studied with Messiaen and collaborates with

saxophone great Jean-Marie Londeix, is a brilliant demonstration by the composer's best champion of just how comprehensively Adolphe Sax's baby has grown up.

Each of the eight tracks, whether short études or more substantial musical statements, share the composer's vocabulary, technique and style in which subtle variations in every conceivable sound the sax can make, including audible breathing and the dramatic tension of extended silences, might (as in the aleatoric *Sonates en arcs* with its crooning simulating of the Greek double aulos) and usually does play an important role.

The études themselves are also wonderful musical experiences, as the short but delicious opening soliloquy of *La main dans le souffle* shows, but it is in the big set pieces, *Jonction* and *Le Frêne égaré*, that Rossé scores

most impressively. Rich in multiphonics and microtonal lines, the former tails away in long, haunting stretches of silence. The latter, written in 1979, employs what Londeix called 'the saxophone's extraordinary idiomatic possibilities' to piece together a musical narrative which, according to Estes, assistant professor of music at the University of Mississippi, 'articulates a global acoustic effect of sound versus silence'.

It's all a bit impersonal but never antiseptic, and always burns with the music's intellectually heady designs. The fact that Estes's playing has been informed not only by his own outstanding chops but by his interviews with Rossé, with whom he has collaborated on a number of compositions, and his developing his own études for budding young saxophonists who want to play Rossé's music, makes the performances authoritative. **Laurence Vittes**

'Contact'

Abe Prism Rhapsody II^a Ford Stubernic Fantasy^b Higdon Percussion Concerto^c D McCarthy Chamber Symphony No 1^d

^aKeiko Abe mari^b Mark Ford abd mari^cperc^bPaul

Rennick mari^bSandi Rennick mari^bNorth Texas

Wind Symphony / Eugene Migliaro Corporon

GIA Wind Works © CD1043 (70' • DDD)

'Taylor Made'

Conte A Copland Portrait Cuong Moth Dooley Mavericks Grantham Symphony No 2, 'After Hafiz' Kozhevnikov Symphony No 3, 'Slavyanskaya' Stephenson Three Bones Concerto^a

^aTony Baker, ^aNatalie Mannix, ^aSteven Menard tbrns

North Texas Wind Symphony /

Eugene Migliaro Corporon

GIA Wind Works © CD1039 (75' • DDD)



The North Texas Wind Symphony are nothing if not industrious, with a recording history going back to the late 1980s. Director Eugene Migliaro Corporon consistently draws playing of the highest quality from the band, as I noted in my review of a clutch of their recordings last year (4/17), and this new pair carry on where they left off. 'Contact' focuses on concertante works, the band partnering percussion virtuoso Mark Ford (and friends). Pick of the crop is Jennifer Higdon's fabulous Grammy Award-winning Percussion Concerto (2004-05), given here in its popular 2008

wind band arrangement. Ford proves more than equal to its demands in a driving performance of rhythmic precision and considerable poetry. He is partnered by the marimba legend Keiko Abe in the latter's arrangement of her *Prism Rhapsody II* (1996, for single instrument and orchestra) for two marimbas and wind band. This appears to be a recording of its 2003 premiere.

Ford's own *Stubernic Fantasy* (2012) for three players at one marimba – no doubt fun to watch – makes a breezy opener but attempts no expressive profundity. Neither does Daniel McCarthy's Chamber Symphony No 1 (1993), primarily inspired by the landscape of Michigan. 'Taylor Made' by chance features second and third symphonies by other hands, neither leaving a lasting impression. Indeed, the *Slavyanskaya* Symphony (1950) of Boris Kozhevnikov (1906-85), a contemporary of Shostakovich, strikes me as a Soviet-Realist dance suite of the dullest type, however much it may be fun to play. Donald Grantham's *After Hafiz* (1993) is not so much a symphony, either, as a lyric triptych inspired by three of the 14th-century Persian writer's poems.

'Taylor Made' is rather mixed, to be honest. David Conte's *A Copland Portrait* (1999) is pleasant but unexceptional; James Stephenson's *Three Bones Concerto* for trombone trio (2013) fun but lightweight. The slickest, most attractive works are *Moth* (2013) by the California-born Viet Cuong (*b*1990; yes, he has a brother named Nam) and Paul Dooley's *Mavericks* (2016). Both are virtuoso, *Moth* a vibrant, compelling tone poem about dark and light, *Mavericks* descriptive of the giant winter surf waves of northern California. GIA's sound, as before, is first-rate.

Guy Rickards

'Final Answer'

Aminikia Music of Spheres^a Bielawa Vireo - Opening: Forest^a Bleckmann Final Answer^b Glass Hydrogen Jukebox - Father Death Blues Kahane Back of the Choir Kihlstedt Herring Run Vrebalov Bubbles^c Welch Salute on the Birth of Rory Mor^d Zorn Columbina

San Francisco Girls Chorus / Valérie Sainte-Agathe with ^bTheo Bleckmann voc ^cAndy Meyerson

vibraphone ^dMatthew Welch bagpipes

^{ac}Kronos Quartet

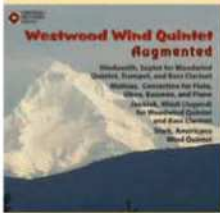
Orange Mountain © OMM0126 (76' • DDD)



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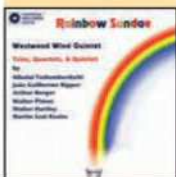
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A remarkable tapestry of teenage voices: the San Francisco Girls Chorus and Valérie Sainte-Agathe, with the Kronos Quartet

Chorus are receiving their first recordings, which brings up a pertinent question: will this music ever sound any more vital or affecting? The ensemble, led by artistic director Lisa Bielawa and conducted here by music director Valérie Sainte-Agathe, is a remarkable tapestry of teenage voices. They appear to be capable of handling any vocal challenge set before them. Beauty of tone, exceptional agility and keen attention to words mark everything the choristers touch.

On this new disc, Bielawa and Sainte-Agathe test the chorus in a rich array of styles as conjured by nine composers. The group are impressive in everything, but especially in the *a cappella* scores, including John Zorn's lyrical, lilting *Columbina*, set to pointed and extended syllables, and Gabriel Kahane's *Back of the Choir*, which chatters away to an Anne Carson poem while also embracing the verses' poignant implications. Philip Glass's *Father Death Blues*, touching Americana set to a poem by Allen Ginsberg, benefits from the chorus's pure intensity, a quality used to different, equally vivid effect in Carla Kihlstedt's radiant *Herring Run*.

The ensemble teams seamlessly with the Kronos Quartet in Bielawa's haunting 'Opening: Forest' and Aleksandra Vrebelov's *Bubbles*, which is as exuberant as its title (and contains important colouristic contributions from vibraphonist Andy Meyerson). Sahba Aminikia transforms the three Iranian lullabies in his *Music of Spheres* into

enchanting narratives. The bagpipes that catapult Matthew Welch's *Salute on the Birth of Rory Mor* are played by the composer in a work of bountiful and heartfelt creativity. And in the disc's titular piece, *Final Answer*, the chorus applies its special magic to Theo Bleckmann's probing paean to rationality and hope. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Shadow Etchings'

Besingrad *Le soupir du roseau dans les bras du vent* **Bunk/Cage** *Winter Variations*^a **Dulaney**

A Turning Inwards **Gross** *Variations on a Schenker* **Graph of Gesualdo** **Kaufman** *Hang*

Down Your Head **Minakakis** *Skiagrafies II*^b

Ye *Self-Portrait*

Orlando Cela *fls*^a **Sivan Etiedgee** *pf*

^b**Stratis Minakakis** *resonance pf*

Ravello © RR7982 (63' • DDD)



Orlando Cela brings an adventurer's spirit to 'Shadow Etchings', his disc of new music

for flute. Each work requires the ability to master extended techniques of often daunting intricacy, from sudden extremes of range and violent eruptions to hums, grunts and assorted pyrotechnics. Cela does so with exceptional dexterity and colour, sustaining interest even when the music becomes amorphous.

Debussy's *Syrinx* makes a crucial appearance in Jean-Patrick Besingrad's *Le soupir du roseau dans les bras de vent*, which expands in numerous sonic directions as the flautist plays multiphonics, flutter-tongued passages and windy flourishes. In Lou Bunk's *Winter Variations*, a piano emits staccato chords and fading sonorities – inspired by John Cage's *Winter Music* – as the flautist (alternating between alto flute and piccolo) produces icy fragments.

Cela teams with an electronic recording of himself playing and vocalising in Robert Gross's otherworldly *Variations on a Schenker Graph of Gesualdo*. The theme of the folk tune 'Tom Dooley' forms the basis for Dana Kaufman's *Hang Down Your Head*, which finds the flautist singing, sometimes in Tuvan throat fashion, amid a spectrum of whirlwind variations.

The disc's titular work, in Greek, is Stratis Minakakis's *Skiagrafies II*, three short movements of subtle interactions between flute and piano resonance (played by the composer). Edward Maxwell Dulaney's *A Turning Inwards* employs all sorts of techniques to mystifying effect, while the 'inner struggle as an artist' that Ziteng Ye depicts in his *Self-Portrait* gives Cela a vast expressive canvas on which to paint the composer's compelling, Eastern-tinged musings.

Donald Rosenberg

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Pictured: Cecilia Bartoli (Decca/© Uli Weber/St Petersburg 2014) who featured on the November 2014 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$136.50; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (\$94); Digital Club (\$130); Gramophone Club (\$168). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe \$28.99 Rest of World \$35.75. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Looking for links and making connections

A theme will often emerge from the features in any given issue of *Gramophone*. Sometimes this will be intentional, though sometimes it only becomes apparent when the copy is filed and the stories told.

The initial, obvious theme this month would appear to be the voice. Birgit Nilsson was one of the most brilliant of 20th-century opera stars – though somehow the word star, though completely justified, doesn't seem quite right for the down-to-earth, no-nonsense person who emerges from Mike Ashman's centenary celebration. Self-taught, 'practical' as remembered by Sir John Tooley, without 'the trappings of a prima donna' as remembered by Valerie Solti. When looking through photographs to illustrate our feature, it was noticeable that almost all the ones that convey the classic image of a 'great soprano' seemed to be have been taken from the stalls, looking up through the spotlight at an actor in role on stage. All those from, we might say, real life, seem, well 'real life': Nilsson on her family farm, Nilsson fooling around light-heartedly; rarely if ever playing the diva. Perhaps it's this grounded humanity which makes her insight into the many complex, challenging and challenged characters she portrayed still so communicative for listeners several decades on (and how lucky we are that her career coincided with the huge growth of the record industry in the late 1950s and early '60s).

Roderick Williams likewise comes across as the antithesis of an 'opera star', though again the label is no less deserved. This one-time school teacher may have since graced the stages of Covent Garden



Martin

and the Last Night of the Proms but, as he tells Neil Fisher, it's to the classroom he's about to return, touring a translation of *Winterreise* – 'Winter's Journey' – to primary and secondary schools, making the case that Lieder could be, and should be, as powerful as any other type of music. Williams is one of the most humanly communicative of singers, whether in the inner dark depths of a Schubert song-cycle or as a touchingly endearing Papageno: I can think of nobody better suited for such a crucial mission (and, if the seed falls on particularly fertile imaginations, potentially a life-changing one).

And finally, I visited St John's College, Cambridge to interview the choir's Music Director Andrew Nethsingha. During our conversation, I was struck by the weight he gave to the idea of choral music-making being about, above all else, the conveying of meaning and message. This is true of all singing worth hearing, of course, but the importance he gives to helping children as young as nine engage with, and then communicate, the deep personal reflections of, say, the Psalms left a great impression on me. Children as young as nine who are, it is humbling to remind ourselves, performing some of the most extraordinary music ever written, at the highest of levels.

And so, did you spot the emerging theme? For me, at the heart of these three features about three very different facets of vocal music lies communication. The desire, and ability, to reach others with the essence of the art of singing, whether in person or, through recording, throughout the world.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'The sheer warmth of affection in which Birgit Nilsson was held by the three colleagues and associates

I interviewed was a special treat,' writes **MIKE ASHMAN**, 'as was the chance to survey her entire career via her autobiography and the special tribute volume prepared by Sony and the Foundation.'



'Few singers are as naturally communicative as Roderick Williams,' says **NEIL FISHER**, who interviews

the baritone, 'so perhaps it's no surprise that he has embraced the most celebrated of Schubert's song-cycles, *Winterreise*, in English. And his plans to take Lieder to hundreds of schoolchildren are inspiring.'



'You have to really immerse yourself in Olga Neuwirth's music, but it's worth the effort,' reflects

the author of this month's Contemporary Composer feature, **PAUL KILBEY**. 'I find her music so provocative, and I hope the feature inspires readers to dive in and explore it.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyl ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

CONTENTS

Volume 95 Number 1161

EDITORIAL

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophone@markallengroup.com
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Martin Cullingford
DEPUTY EDITOR Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
REVIEWS EDITOR Tim Parry / 020 7501 6367
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR James McCarthy / 020 7501 6366
SUB-EDITOR David Thresher / 020 7501 6370
SUB-EDITOR Marija Đurić Speare
ART DIRECTOR Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689
PICTURE EDITOR Sunita Sharma-Gibson / 020 7501 6369
AUDIO EDITOR Andrew Everard
EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR Libby McPhee
THANKS TO Hannah Nepil and Charlotte Gardner
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James Jolly

ADVERTISING

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophoneads@markallengroup.com
COMMERCIAL MANAGER
 Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368
SALES EXECUTIVE
 Simon Davies / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0800 137201 (UK) +44 (0)1722 716997 (overseas)
 subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 7738 5454
HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL
STRATEGY Luca Da Re / 020 7501 6362
MARKETING MANAGER Edward Craggs / 020 7501 6384
GROUP INSTITUTIONAL SALES
MANAGER Jas Atwal
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Richard Hamshire / 01722 716997
PRODUCTION MANAGER Jon Redmayne
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997
SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER Chris Hoskins / 01722 716997
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Martin Cullingford
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Paul Geoghegan
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Ben Allen
CHAIRMAN Mark Allen



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Reviews

EDITOR'S CHOICE

The 12 most highly recommended recordings of the month

RECORDING OF THE MONTH 30

Christian Tetzlaff is joined by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Hannu Lintu in compelling accounts of Bartók's violin concertos

ORCHESTRAL 32

Thielemann conducts Bruckner's First Symphony; impressive Ferneyhough from Brabbins; François-Xavier Roth's Ravel

CHAMBER 52

The Eybler Quartet play early Beethoven; John Jenkins from Fretwork; Zelenka Trio Sonatas

INSTRUMENTAL 66

Biss's Beethoven; Franck organ works from Bjørn Boysen; James Rhodes's latest album

VOCAL 76

Bernstein's *Mass* from Philadelphia; Byrd motets from King's; ceremonial music by William Hayes; Carloyn Dobbin sings Northern Irish songs

OPERA 90

Meyerbeer's *La Prophète*; Max Emanuel Cenčić sings arias by Popora; classic Wagner reissues

JAZZ & WORLD MUSIC 99

Reviews from our sister titles *Jazzwise* and *Songlines*

REISSUES 102

Karl Böhm's complete opera recordings

BOX-SET ROUND-UP 105

REPLAY 106

The *bel canto* violin of Alfredo Campoli; Wandy Tworek; further violin treasures on DVD

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED 108

Two of our critics revisit Ivo Pogorelich's 1983 DG recording of Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*

BOOKS 110

Stephen Walsh's portrait of Debussy; a biography of the tenor Wilfred Brown

GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION 112

Mike Ashman guides us through the recorded history of Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*

REVIEWS INDEX 136



Features

FOR THE RECORD 8

The latest classical music news

BIRGIT NILSSON AT 100 14

We celebrate the Swedish soprano's legacy through the memories of her friends and colleagues – and, of course, her recordings

RODERICK WILLIAMS 22

The engaging baritone tells us why he's recorded Schubert's *Winterreise* in English – and is then taking it on tour around schools

ANDREW NETHSINGHA 26

As the St John's College, Cambridge release a disc of Vaughan Williams, their Music Director explores the role of his choir in the modern age

THE MUSICIAN & THE SCORE 50

Gabriel Schwabe talks *Gramophone* readers through the score of Schumann's Cello Concerto

ICONS 64

Ernest Lough's treble solo on 'Hear my prayer' has been adored for generations: we tell his story

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS 74

An introduction to Olga Neuwirth, whose references range from Monteverdi to Miles Davis

MUSICAL CONNECTIONS 101

From songs in translation to May-inspired music, James Jolly invites you on two listening journeys

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE 88

Paul Sacher's major commissions explored

PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS 118

Our guide to what to watch – both live and online

HIGH FIDELITY 121

Our monthly offering of audio news and reviews

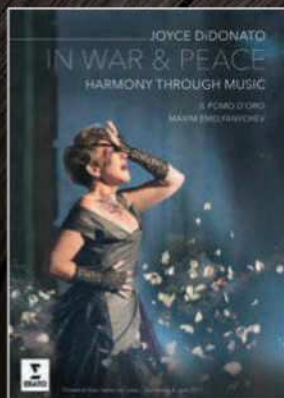
NOTES & LETTERS 130

NEW RELEASES 132

MY MUSIC 138

Manuel Lobo Antunes, the Portuguese Ambassador to the UK, on his musical journey

NEW RELEASES ON WARNER CLASSICS AND ERATO



JOYCE DIDONATO IN WAR & PEACE - HARMONY THROUGH MUSIC

Recorded live in June 2017 at the magnificent Liceu Theatre in Barcelona, this DVD is the companion to Joyce DiDonato's award-winning album.

DVD / Blu-Ray



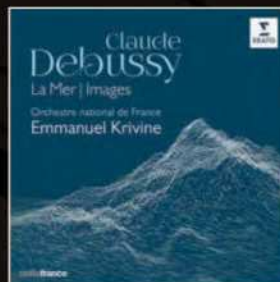
PHILIPPE JAROUSKY GLUCK: ORFEO ED EURIDICE

Here in this world-première recording of the Napoli 1774 version of Gluck's masterpiece, includes Orfeo's restrained, but moving lament, 'Che farò senza Euridice'.



EMMANUEL PAHUD SOLO

Interweaving the Baroque and the modern eras with music for unaccompanied flute by Telemann, Nielsen, Honegger, Varèse, Berio, Takemitsu, Pärt, Pintscher and Widmann.



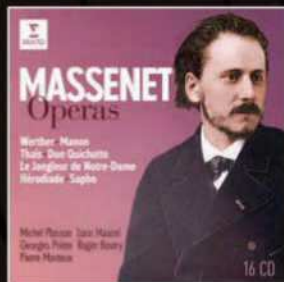
ORCHESTRE NATIONAL DE FRANCE EMMANUEL KRIVINE DEBUSSY: LA MER, IMAGES

Debussy's *La Mer* in its revised 1909 version, including a rarely-heard third movement excerpt from the 1905 version complete with fanfare, cut from the later edition.



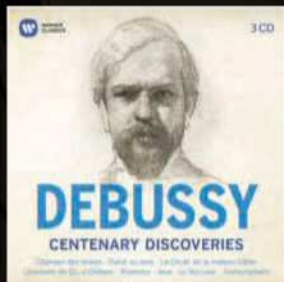
SOPHIE PACINI SCHUMANN & MENDELSSOHN

A fascinating series exploring personal and musical relationships between Robert Schumann and Felix Mendelssohn; between Schumann and his wife Clara, and between Mendelssohn and his sister Fanny. Music by all four of them is complemented by Liszt's transcription of Schumann's glorious love song to Clara, 'Widmung'.



PLASSON, PRÊTRE, MAAZEL, MONTEUX, BOUTRY MASSENET: OPERAS

The most comprehensive Massenet Opera collection ever released, this 16 CD box set pays tribute to the great French composer Jules Massenet.



ARMENGAUD, CASSARD, ENSEMBLE LES ESSENTIELLES DEBUSSY CENTENARY DISCOVERIES

Rarities including *Chanson des brises* and *Diane aux bois*, the unfinished opera *La Chute de la Maison Usher* is heard just as Debussy left it; plus more to be discovered.



JOSEPH KEILBERTH ICON: THE TELEFUNKEN RECORDINGS 1953-1963

To mark the 50th anniversary the death of the great German conductor Joseph Keilberth, a 21 CD collection of his Telefunken Post-war recordings.



ANDRÉ CLUYTENS LALO: LE ROI D'YS

A new reissue of this very rare recording, previously released on LP in France before a short-lived CD release, is now available once again.



JOHN NELSON BERLIOZ: BENVENUTO CELLINI

Following John Nelson's critically acclaimed and award winning *Le Troyens*, a welcome reissue of his monumental *Benvenuto Cellini* confirming his mastery of Berlioz.

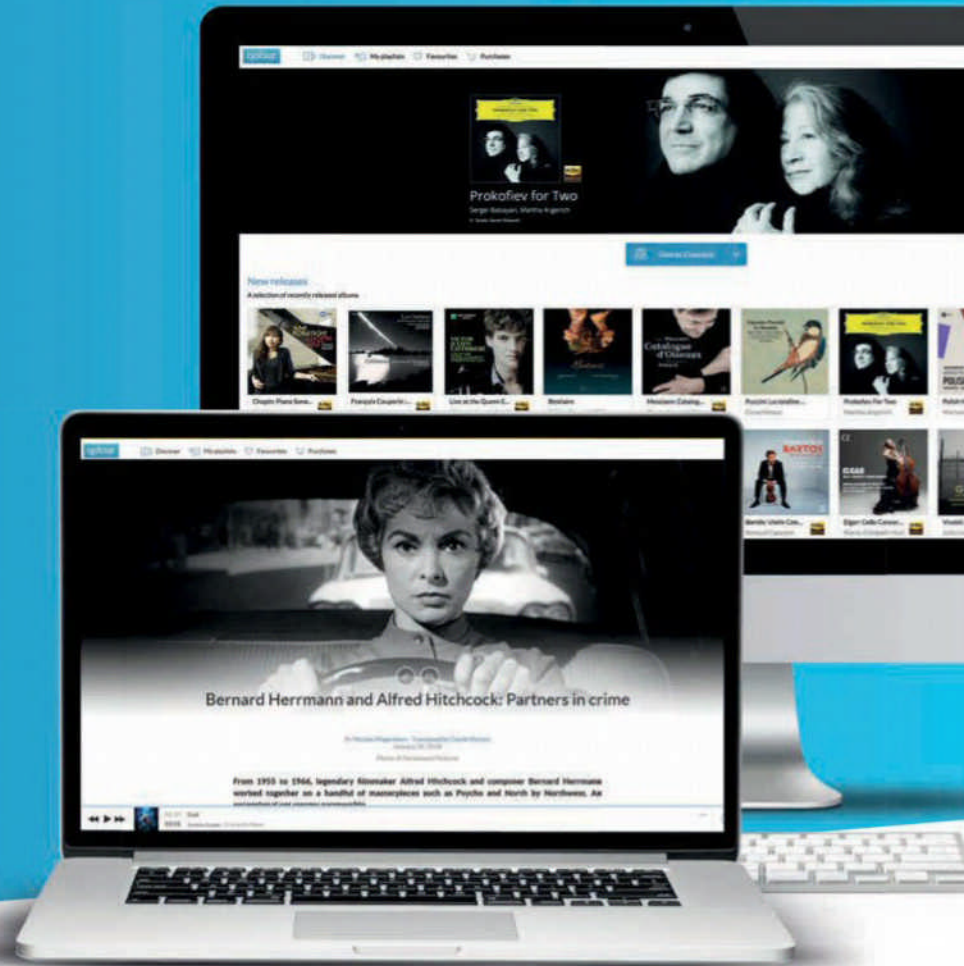
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullumford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BARTÓK
Violin Concertos
Christian Tetzlaff;
Finnish Radio
Symphony
Orchestra /
Hannu Lintu
Ondine
► **ROB COWAN'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 30**

From the fierce rhythms to the moments of great fragility, Christian Tetzlaff, a supreme soloist, and Hannu Lintu take us on a thrilling journey through Bartók's two violin concertos.



BEETHOVEN Piano
Concertos Nos 2 & 4
Royal Northern Sinfonia /
Lars Vogt
Ondine

An enjoyable cycle reaches its conclusion in considerable style – the rapport between Lars Vogt and his Northern Sinfonia feels natural and joyous after a rewarding journey.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 22**



FERNEYHOUGH Le
terre est un homme, etc.
Soli; BBC Symphony
Orchestra /
Martyn Brabbins
NMC

A fine birthday present for Ferneyhough's 75th, his music – complex, sometimes confrontational, often demanding – given truly skilful and devoted advocacy.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**



VIVALDI The Four
Seasons
Brecon Baroque /
Rachel Podger
Channel Classics

If ever a disc were self-recommending, this is it: one of today's most consistently brilliant Baroque violinists, records one of the era's most famed and engaging works. Enjoy!

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



REICH Drumming
Synergy Vocals;
Colin Currie Group
Colin Currie Records
One of minimalism's
most significant – and

most epic – works is given a mesmeric performance by Colin Currie and colleagues, who beautifully handle its rhythmic patterns and phasing.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



SCHUMANN
String Quartets, Op 41 -
Nos 2 & 3
Elias Quartet
Alpha

One is left feeling that the hugely impressive Elias Quartet have thought about every nuance and detail of these works; add in the rich sound, and it's a very fine release indeed.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



HAYDN
Piano Sonatas, HobXVI -
No 32; No 40; No 49;
No 50
Paul Lewis *pf*
Harmonia Mundi

If last month's interview with Paul Lewis whetted your appetite for what we hope may be a long Haydn sonata journey, this well chosen first set won't disappoint!

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



**MOMPOU. RAVEL.
BROCAL**
Piano works
Julien Brocal *pf*
Rubicon

There's a sensitive, beguiling grace to Julien Brocal's playing throughout this recital, which seems to effortlessly convey a captivating world of colour and mood.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



VICTORIA
Tenebrae Responsories
Stile Antico
Harmonia Mundi
The Tenebrae
Responsories are

full of poignant inner drama, something Victoria's music well embodies, and which Stile Antico powerfully capture in this highly communicative performance.

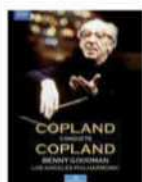
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



'ENFERS'
Operatic excerpts by
Gluck and Rameau
Soli; Pygmalion /
Raphaël Pichon
Harmonia Mundi

An intriguing concept, about which our critic had his doubts, though none at all about these thrilling performances, bursting with a gripping theatricality.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 97**



DVD/BLU-RAY
'COPLAND CONDUCTS COPLAND'
Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Aaron Copland
Naxos

A chance to see Aaron Copland conducting his own works – 'a great watch, and a rewarding listen as well' writes our reviewer Christian Hoskins.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 35**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
**'THE BEL CANTO
VIOLIN' - VOL 5**
Alfredo Campoli *vn*
LPO / Boult; Bliss
Decca Eloquence

The standout set from a wonderful series celebrating the legacy of Alfredo Campoli.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 106**



Listen to many of
the Editor's Choice
recordings online at
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FOR THE RECORD

Barenboim signs to DG

Daniel Barenboim has signed a new and exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, the focus of which will be the Pierre Boulez Saal, home to the Barenboim-Said Akademie and described as 'a centre for the cultivation of communication, listening and understanding' which opened in Berlin a year ago.

Barenboim is no stranger to DG of course – his first record for the label was made 45 years ago – or indeed to its fellow Universal label Decca, which most recently released his acclaimed Elgar symphony recordings. But under the new deal, DG will create three distinct series: 'Barenboim the Pianist and Conductor', 'Barenboim the Chamber Music Player' and 'Barenboim the Educator and Innovator' – the latter being digital-only (the releases will appear on Barenboim's own Peral Music label) and be complemented by children's TV programmes. The first releases will be the complete Brahms symphonies with the Staatskapelle Berlin (in June), and Mozart's two piano quartets with Michael Barenboim, Kian Soltani and Yulia Deyneka (July). Future projects include Dvořák's Cello Concerto with Kian Soltani and the Staatskapelle Berlin, and Smetana's *Má vlast* with the Vienna Philharmonic.

'I welcome this exclusive relationship with Deutsche Grammophon and believe that it will introduce the philosophy of the Pierre Boulez Saal, with its vision of the "thinking ear"



and of active, engaged listening, to a large new audience,' says Barenboim. 'We want to share what happens when performers explore music on all levels – emotional, sensory, spiritual, intellectual – and open minds to the understanding and insights that this can bring to our lives. There is so much that music can teach us about being human, about healing division and harmonising the rational and the irrational, the logical and the intuitive.'

Vatican debuts live-concert stream with James MacMillan



To the world's leading opera houses, music festivals and competitions which have embraced live concert streaming, we can now add the Sistine Chapel.

The Coro recording of Sir James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* earned an Editor's Choice in May 2017 and was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award last year, and on April 22 it will be streamed live from the Vatican. If you're an early bird when it comes to reading your *Gramophone*, you might just catch it live, if not don't worry: it will remain on the Classic FM website for a month to view free of charge. Harry Christophers will conduct The Sixteen and Britten Sinfonia, the artists who gave the premiere in London in 2016.

The work was commissioned by the Genesis Foundation whose Founder and Chairman, John Studzinski, said that 'it is rare for a new, hour-long work of sacred music to move audiences across the world as soon as it has been premiered, but James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* is that rarity. A masterpiece, it has instantly connected audiences to the timeless story of Mary's suffering as she observed the suffering and death of her son Jesus and simultaneously rose to become the Mother of Mankind.'

Maestros on the move – all change in Vienna and Munich

The Vienna Symphony Orchestra has appointed Andrés Orozco-Estrada (pictured) as its next Music Director.

The Colombia-born, Vienna-trained 40-year-old will succeed Philippe Jordan, the current incumbent, at the start of the 2021-22 season. The contract is for an initial five years.

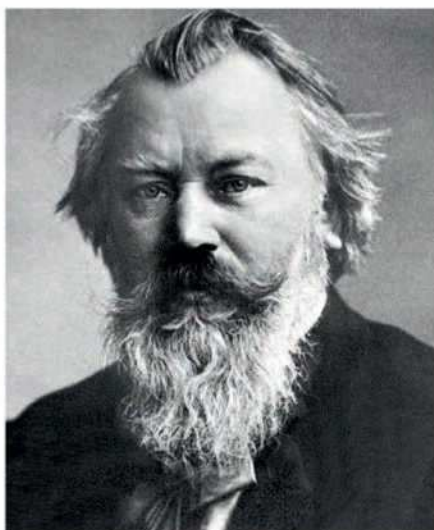
Since 2014 Orozco-Estrada has been Music Director of the Houston Symphony Orchestra and Chief Conductor of the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, with which he received an Editor's Choice in our January issue for a recording of *Salome*, described in his *Gramophone* review by Hugo Shirley as 'a deeply musical account of the score'.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Jurowski has been named as General Music Director of the Bavarian State Opera, also from 2021, and initially for four years, working alongside Serge Dorny, currently the Director of the Opéra National de Lyon, who will take up the position of Intendant at the same time. The move will also see Jurowski step down at the end of the 2020-21 season from his post as Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which he's held since 2007.



PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL SCHIRNHOFER/DG, STEFANO PROSPERO SPATARO, WERNER KMETITSCH

Gramophone playlists on Medici



Brahms provides the inspiration for a Medici playlist

Last month we launched our monthly playlist of films on **medici.tv** with a focus on the music of Debussy. This month, Brahms guides our recommendations. From the Verbier Festival, Anne Sofie von Otter and friends give us the *Liebeslieder-Walzer*, Rudolf

Kempe conducts the Second Symphony with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra in 1973 while Sir Simon Rattle and his Berlin Philharmonic perform the First Piano Concerto (with Daniel Barenboim) alongside Schoenberg's orchestration of the first Piano Quartet, a 2004 concert recorded in the striking setting of Athens's Herod Atticus Odeon. Yuja Wang and Leonidas Kavakos perform the violin sonatas and Claudio Abbado conducts *A German Requiem*.

Barenboim re-appears to dispense his wisdom as conductor in a masterclass with the young Robin Ticciati (who adorned last month's front cover). Our Young Artist focus finds the cellist Edgar Moreau playing Shostakovich and, in the documentary slot, Nicolai Gedda, the great Swedish tenor, takes the limelight. And if you want to compare two major conductors in the same work, how about watching Leonard Bernstein and Pierre Boulez in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

To find out more, visit **medici.tv** and type 'Gramophone selects' into the 'Search here' box.

ONE TO WATCH

Ben Goldscheider Horn



Ben Goldscheider is the only student of the great Czech horn player Radek Baborák at the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin. The son of professional string players, Goldscheider started to learn the cello, but turned to the French horn when he was diagnosed with the lung condition bronchiectasis at the age of six, as a way of strengthening his lungs. Progress was

rapid, and at the age of 18 he won the brass category of the BBC Young Musician competition in 2016, the year that cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason ultimately triumphed.

Goldscheider's competition programme included works that he has now recorded for his debut disc, released by Willowhayne Records and reviewed on page 62, not least Esa-Pekka Salonen's extraordinary *Concert étude* for solo horn, which demonstrates the sheer range of sound and the athleticism the instrument is capable of. As well as contemporary solo pieces – bold choices for any debut disc – Goldscheider is joined by pianist Daniel Hill in works by Schumann, York Bowen, Krufft and Kirchner. As Goldscheider puts it, his intention is 'to capture the development of the horn as it grew from its natural state with no valves, to the full double chromatic horn today', and this debut album showcases the music's resulting increase in virtuosity.

Such an exploratory personality, as well as musical maturity and technical ease, bodes well for Goldscheider's development. We'll be hearing a lot more of him.

FOR THE RECORD

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit **gramophone.co.uk** for ...

Podcasts

The young Polish countertenor Jakub Józef Orliński, one of the newest members of the Erato artist roster, is something of an internet sensation – there are two performances on YouTube of the Vivaldi aria, 'Vedrò, con mio diletto', that have been watched tens



Jakub Józef Orliński features in our podcast series

of thousands of times. He was in London recently for performances of Handel's *Rinaldo* with The English Concert and our Editor-in-Chief James Jolly went to meet him.

Songlines

Our sister magazine *Songlines*, which is dedicated to traditional, contemporary, folk and fusion music from around the world, has launched a beautifully presented new website which is well worth a visit if you want to discover some new sound worlds. Simply go to **songlines.co.uk** to start exploring.

Facebook & Twitter

With more than 110,000 followers across Facebook and Twitter, *Gramophone* is part of a thriving community of people who are passionate about classical music – join us!

IN THE STUDIO

Pianist **Steven Osborne** has recorded Rachmaninov's *Etudes-tableaux* Opp 33 and 39 for Hyperion. The recording, made in Kentish Town last August, will be released in the summer ● The cellist **Alban Gerhardt** has been treated to a 50th-birthday present by Hyperion (this landmark birthday falls next year). At Wyastone Estate, he was joined by producer Andrew Kenner and engineer Simon Eadon to record Bach's cello suites, an ambition he'd waited nearly half a century to fulfil ● The soprano **Carolyn Sampson** and **The King's Consort** directed by **Robert King** have recorded arias from Handel's cantatas

Tra le fiamme, Armida abbandonata, Agrippina condotta a morire and *Figlio d'alte speranze* for Vivat – expect an autumn release. The recording was made at the newly-opened Alpheton New Maltings in Suffolk ● **Trio con Brio Copenhagen** are recording the complete Beethoven piano trios for Orchid Media at sessions in Studio 2 at Danish Radio. The project, in three volumes, will be supported by 'Beethoven Zoom', a series of short films (produced with Danish Radio) which 'zoom' into various points of the music to give the listener insight into the challenges Trio con Brio face in the piano-trio lab.

STUDIO FOCUS *Richard Blackford's Niobe*

The composer, the violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen and conductor Ben Gernon discuss recording his new concertante work for violin

What's it like, as a composer, listening to a premiere recording being made?

RB Having given a live performance just before, the challenge is to maintain similar levels of adrenalin, excitement and intensity – while creating as perfect an interpretation and vision as possible.

You evidently enjoyed working with the producer ...

RB We were very lucky to work with a very experienced Czech producer, Jiří Gemrot, who worked often with Jiří Bělohlávek. He's also a composer and knows the orchestra extremely well. He didn't let one misplaced or out-of-tune note, anything off the beat or a misplaced dynamic go by. He has a phenomenal ear and heard mistakes I didn't hear. He immediately established a first-class working relationship with Tamsin and Ben – and they completely trusted him in terms of improving intonation and articulation.

TW-C You want a producer you can completely trust, who listens for everything and picks everything up. They are the ones who make the recording, really. The orchestra [the Czech Philharmonic] have embraced the piece too. It's been a really lovely few days – a really great team.

You went very quickly from a live premiere to a studio recording, in the same hall ...

BG Yes. Suddenly we have a producer and sound engineer in the team. It brings a new intensity. The acoustic in the Rudolfinum is very 'live' – you might call it a 'bathroom' – and it is easier to judge balance through headphones on a playback than in the hall itself.

TW-C It's a big score, with a lot of complicated rhythms. The recording gave us an opportunity to make sure we had it all as we wanted it. Having played that premiere, we could approach the recording with a greater understanding of the piece and I really believe we have played with performance energy through all the takes.

What are the particular challenges of the piece?

TW-C It's always the case with a new piece that you're leaping into the unknown. However much you've rehearsed it, it only truly lives for the first time on the stage.

BG To find the legato, the aggression and also the tenderness. This is a story that evolves at quite a pace, so we had to find the necessary tension, whilst also maintaining the through line.



The happy trio of violinist, composer and conductor

Did you have to re-balance the piece for the recording?

RB For the recording, we had a microphone close to the violinist throughout, so there was no danger of drowning the soloist out. This enabled us to find a greater richness and volume in the accompaniment.

BG We certainly had to play certain passages more loudly than in the concert – an audience always alters some of the sound in the hall. We had to be much more precise and very dry. Getting the percussion right was a challenge.

The recording of Niobe will be released by Signum Classics in May

El Sistema founder dies

José Antonio Abreu, the founder of El Sistema, the musical programme which transformed the lives of many disadvantaged Venezuelans has died, aged 78.

El Sistema began in a Caracas car park in 1975, and grew to become a worldwide phenomenon, spearheaded by the success of one its most famous alumni, Gustavo Dudamel. His 2007 Proms appearance with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra captured the imagination of the audience with its sheer joy in music-making. Sistema-style projects were soon replicated

elsewhere, including Sistema England, founded by Julian Lloyd Webber.

While in recent years El Sistema has found itself caught up in the political turmoil affecting Venezuela, its ideal of how music can transform young lives continues to resonate. Lloyd Webber noted: 'It is impossible to overestimate the extraordinary achievements of José Abreu who, by drawing on the power of music, saved many children from lives of poverty and crime'.



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ARTISTS & THEIR INSTRUMENTS

Cellist John Myerscough on the Doric Quartet's Classical bows



“We've always played the Classical string quartet repertoire with an awareness of period style. But then we became aware that some musicians –

modern players like us – were using Classical, transitional-period bows for the Classical repertoire. Two years ago, we thought we should bite the bullet.

We got in touch with Luis Emilio Rodriguez Carrington, a Mexican bow-maker who lives in The Hague. His bows are modelled on those that would have been around at the turn of the 19th century. Musician friends we spoke to had recommended him. So we met him when we were on tour in Holland – we got to know him, and spoke to him a lot about what we were looking for in our bows and the idea behind why we felt they might suit us. He let us try some out, with us taking the Haydn quartets as our starting point.

Over the next six months we talked to him frequently; it was a collaborative experience, it was about trying to find bows that suited us as individuals but that also suited our group's overall style.

We've now settled on four bows. I quickly worked out what I wanted – I think the second or third one I tried was the right one – whereas Hélène [Clément, viola] has only just settled on hers in the last couple of months. But the wonderful thing with this bow-maker is that this isn't the end of it. If we buy new instruments or want something different later on, he's very open to that and will let us

change our bows accordingly. I imagine that what we need will change as we all change – both as individual musicians and as a quartet.

When we tried these new bows, what we realised instantly was that we were on the right track with this Classical repertoire. It was almost as if they were speaking to us. They offer a bigger range of articulation for a start – you can really search for a greater clarity in the music, which we're all really interested in doing anyway, and they allow all voices to be heard at the same time. They also encourage a certain sort of phrasing, and respond extremely quickly – you can do a sharp, strong, accented note which will instantly fade away if you want it to. They are a bit quieter, but what they lose in volume they make up for in clarity; there's a softness but a focus, too.

The balance of the wood is very different to a modern bow – the stick is shorter, and the wood is thinner. And compared to a modern bow, the heel, or the 'frog', is much lighter – it's made from ivory taken from woolly mammoths, so it's potentially 30,000 years old! This is actually a generally accepted source of ivory nowadays. All bow-makers have signed an agreement not to use elephant ivory and, while there are synthetic alternatives, many are using a relatively large supply of woolly mammoth tusks hidden away, frozen, in Siberia.

We recorded the Haydn String Quartets Op 64 [reviewed in *Gramophone's* April issue] using the new bows, and we've also just recorded a Mendelssohn disc using them which was really exciting – particularly the F minor, Op 80, one of his most dreadfully tragic, stormy, shocking pieces. It's all about clarity, drama and range of articulation and these bows help with that – you can get a grittier, darker sound. Compared to modern bows you have to work the sound out of them more, your hand needs to be closer to the strings, but that means that you feel a greater connection with what's going on.

We're probably being slightly naughty using the bows in Mendelssohn because the modern bow was already established by then – but there was a crossover period, so it's fine! We're playing Beethoven's Op 130 *Grosse Fuge* with them too. People thought it was a bit risky, but it's been a revelation!”

The Doric Quartet's Chandos recording of Mendelssohn will be released in September. Visit doricstringquartet.com

The Met sacks James Levine

New York's Metropolitan Opera ended its 40-year relationship with James Levine, its Music Director from 1976 to 2016, following a three-month investigation which it claims 'uncovered credible evidence that Mr Levine had engaged in sexually abusive and harassing conduct'. Three days after its statement, Levine launched a lawsuit against the Met for breach of contract and defamation, denying any wrongdoing and seeking \$5.8 million in damages.

Musician wins case against ROH

A viola player, Chris Goldscheider, has won a case against London's Royal Opera House, following Acoustic Shock sustained during a rehearsal of *Die Walküre* in 2012, in which he was seated in front of the brass section, and which has left him unable to work as a musician. In a statement, the Royal Opera House said it was 'surprised and disappointed' by the judgement, and that it had been 'at the forefront

of industry-wide attempts to protect musicians from the dangers of exposure to significant level of performance sound'.

Terezín's composers remembered

Music of Terezín, a film by the Editor-in-Chief of our sister title *Songlines*, Simon Broughton, is now freely available online at holocaustmusic.org. Last broadcast by the BBC 20 years ago, it explores the musical life in the World War II Czech ghetto and tells the stories of many of the Jewish composers who perished.

Spotify floats

Spotify floated on the New York Stock exchange on April 3, valuing the online music streaming service at \$26bn. Since the Swedish company's launch in 2008, Spotify has been a key driver in transforming the way people listen to music. As at the end of last year, it had 157m users, of which 71m were paying subscribers, and was available in 65 countries.

FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson reflects on the deep impression of meeting the 75-year-old Birgit Nilsson



She adorns the front cover of this issue just as she has so many magazine covers in the 100 years since her birth – but eclipsing every personal memory of Birgit Nilsson on record and in the opera house was the moment I walked into a London hotel room to interview her back in 1993. It's impossible to describe that feeling when you've grown up with the sound of a voice in your head, when you've come of age with its heroics, when you've heard live how it shone like a laser, straight and unfailingly true, the core like tempered steel cleaving the mightiest orchestral tuttis, when you've heard Brünnhilde's exultant battle cry with its repeated high Bs plucked cleanly off the ledger lines and nailed to the back of the auditorium, when you've been hit by the realisation that no theatre was actually big enough for her Elektra ... and suddenly she's right there in front of you, a really quite short and trim 75 year old with unusually broad shoulders and an enormous jaw and big-boned face wherein all that resonance was harboured.

As one quite used to putting faces and physiques to voices, I remember being momentarily taken aback as we shook hands but then quickly reassured by the stentorian ring of her speaking voice. Suddenly I could put the voice and the person in front of me together. I remember the practical down-to-earth way in which she conducted the interview and I remember how she consistently refused to characterise her voice as 'big' (tell that to the man at the back of the gallery) preferring to speak in terms of its 'focus', of what she repeatedly referred to as the 'ping' at the centre of every tone. Without that concentration of tone, she said, a big voice was just 'hot air'.

Two things have especially stayed with me from that interview. One was how the voice was in a sense born indomitable and how the farm girl from Vastra Karup in southern Sweden slipped so effortlessly from the Stockholm Royal Academy into the Stockholm Royal Opera where, thanks to lucky (or unlucky) indispositions, her very first role was Agathe in Weber's *Der Freischütz* (three days' preparation) followed in quick succession by Verdi's Lady Macbeth, Sieglinde and the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde. Character-forming or just plain madness? A bit of both, I recall her saying.

The other was a healthy scepticism of well-intentioned teachers (she spoke from bitter experience) and how every singer must ultimately take their own voice in hand and trust their instincts. In her case the national characteristic of minimal vibrato – no cover, no camouflage, just the unvarnished truth – meant absolute sureness of intonation and articulation. I'll go out on a limb here and say that this wasn't a voice to love but a voice to thrill to.

And for anyone who has ever wondered how it must feel to be *inside* a voice like this, to be the source of Isolde's Liebestod at the moment of sublimation, Nilsson's words completely embodied the sound she made: 'It's a lustful feeling ... when everything is in the right place and I hear those tones ringing in my head, then I know all is well.' All was well. **G**

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A resplendent Birgit Nilsson as Turandot at the Vienna State Opera in 1961

BIRGIT NILSSON

at 100

As we celebrate Birgit Nilsson's centenary, **Mike Ashman** explores the great Swedish soprano's legacy through the memories and accounts of her friends and colleagues

Birgit Nilsson, whose 100th anniversary is commemorated on May 17, rapidly became a legend to those with a special interest in big Romantic repertoire who started their opera-going and record-collecting in the 1960s. She was especially esteemed because she had the large heroic voice for Wagner, Richard Strauss and the bigger Verdis believed to have been lacking in the dramatic soprano field for some time, and now seemingly magnificently restored.

'IT WAS GLORIOUS TO KNOW HER' - Sir John Tooley

Sir John Tooley was on the staff of the Royal Opera House during the whole time Nilsson sang there. Her Covent Garden debut was in 1957 with *Die Walküre* under Rudolf Kempe – 'She was mightily impressive even then,' says Tooley who, as General Director, oversaw her last performances in the house – as Elektra under Carlos Kleiber in the 1976-77 season and then when she made a guest appearance in Act 2 of *Die Fledermaus* on New Year's Eve in 1978. Both these appearances had their dramas. Tooley had to persuade Nilsson first of all that Kleiber was not just some young upstart; he said he would only do the performances if she sang Elektra. But then on the first day of rehearsals some imagined insult prompted the conductor to ask for another singer ('Who's this terrible woman?'). Tooley rapidly arranged a reconciliation and the performances were triumphs for both. The *Fledermaus* gala was only achieved after a heroic 15-hour journey by the singer in blizzard conditions from her home in Skåne.

'It was glorious to know her,' says Tooley. 'She was very practical and never wasted time. She knew her parts well,

was always secure in her music, and knew what was right for the house.' He was struck particularly by how her voice projected in the theatre as much as by its size – 'I'm surprised the back wall is still there!' he says.

FROM FARM GIRL TO WIELAND WAGNER'S PROTÉGÉE

The 1950s and '60s were less biographically obsessed than we are today but it was learned, by and by, that Nilsson had sprung out of true obscurity (a farm in the south of Sweden) and was not the product of some exclusive artistic pedigree or even of one particular teacher. She started, self-taught, on the piano her mother (a music lover but not a musician) had bought for her; meanwhile, her father wished she had been a boy and fought any move that would take her away from the farm. Perhaps as a result of this she gained an instinctive desire to preserve what was most natural in her own singing and rejected any teaching, however prestigious, that would make her voice do what didn't feel right. Perhaps this was also the beginning of a vocal technique that gave her seemingly inexhaustible stamina: she would sometimes amuse herself backstage after performing a huge role like Strauss's Salome or Elektra by singing parts of Mozart's Queen of the Night aria or Brünnhilde's war cry.

Nilsson was a late starter who, at 23, was still studying when her compatriot and contemporary Astrid Varnay was debuting at New York's Metropolitan Opera. But having the fortune to study, and to start many of her roles, in Stockholm gave her two advantages. The first was the access she was given to the world of German opera and its conductors – Fritz Busch was particularly significant in inviting Nilsson to Glyndebourne in 1951. The second, in an age where – in most of America and Western Europe outside Germany – the stage director's role



A fresh-faced Birgit Nilsson relaxing at home on the family farm in Svenstad, Skåne

was not as significant as it would later become, was the contact she had with the local tradition of cultivating acting skills in opera singers. With her vocal gifts and dramatic soprano repertoire of, shall we say, many slow-moving and/or regal characters, Nilsson could easily have become one of those *monstres sacrées* who just stood and delivered. But as her career developed in the 1950s she became an appropriate subject for further 'live education' as a singing actor. And that education was imparted by someone no less musically instinctive than the director Wieland Wagner.

Nilsson had met Wieland early on in her career and been offered the part of Sieglinde in the Bayreuth Festival's first *Ring* production after the war. As she was not available, her actual Festival debut took place two years later, in 1953, as the soprano soloist in the commemorative Beethoven Ninth conducted by Paul Hindemith (this controversial 1953 performance is one of the great missing broadcasts – its appearance would make an interesting contribution to Nilsson's 100th-year celebrations). But this was followed by misunderstandings in Bayreuth. Wieland thought he'd discovered the new Maria Müller and begged Nilsson to avoid the heavy roles like Isolde and Brünnhilde; she told him that they were already in her diary. Full Bayreuth appearances followed, first in *Lohengrin* (1954), then *Tristan* (1957) – but in productions by Wieland's brother Wolfgang, of whose 'discoveries' Wieland tended to steer clear (first-time official releases of both these can be heard in the 31-CD box-set of live Nilsson material being released by Sony Classical for the centenary). It was not until 1962 that Wieland and Nilsson first worked together, on a *Tristan* for which she was apparently his (very nervous) last choice.

And it was high time in this soprano's development. Nilsson's repertoire now

extended from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (as Donna Anna) via the title-role in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, most of the 'big' Wagners (and quite a few of the Verdis) to Puccini and Richard Strauss. The mythology surrounding her was already great – hence Wieland's hesitation about using her in his 'workshop Bayreuth'. Already it was being said that her wide-ranging, seemingly inexhaustible supply of tone reflected what singing in the dramatic soprano repertoire used to be and should be, but rarely had been, since 1945. Nilsson's achievements had already become such a phenomenon that both the first Wagner *Ring* cycles on disc (made a realistic proposition by the advent of the long-playing record, now in stereo) and new productions onstage came to revolve around this one singer's availability.

'I have sung Isolde 87 times. But my intention is to work with you as though from the beginning' – Nilsson to Wieland Wagner

For example: in 1960, Decca's opera team headed by John Culshaw knew they had to sign Nilsson for the *Ring* as Brünnhilde, a role that EMI's Walter Legge had offered her but had somehow consistently failed to arrange. Nilsson wanted to do Isolde first – she'd already sung the role in Bayreuth and Covent Garden, then at the Metropolitan with ecstatic front-page reviews that harked back to Kirsten Flagstad's New York debut in the 1930s. So, under pressure to keep her in play, the Culshaw team recorded *Tristan* in Vienna, even accepting a substitute for the planned Jon Vickers. Later, at the end of the decade, the Metropolitan Opera's Rudolf Bing flatly refused to take Herbert von Karajan's Salzburg *Ring* in co-production without Nilsson leading the cast. She hadn't even been in the original production but the maestro had no choice but to give way (the end result, with Karajan's original Brünnhilde, Régine Crespin – who had agreed to return as Sieglinde –



Singing Isolde in Wieland Wagner's production at Bayreuth (opposite Windgassen) transformed Nilsson's career

can be heard officially for the first time in the forthcoming Sony Classical box-set).

Nilsson's stage work with Wieland Wagner at Bayreuth between 1962 and his untimely death four years later had a radical effect on her performing career. 'I have sung Isolde 87 times,' she told Wieland. 'But I have the intention of forgetting all the interpretations up to now and working with you as though from the beginning.' The result – according to her uneven but moving and often entertainingly witty autobiography (*La Nilsson*; Northeastern University Press: 2007, translated from the German by Doris Jung Popper) – was 'What heaven!' She elaborates: 'Wieland could bring out the most varied characterisations through the mere suggestion of a gesture. The complicated psychological problems he explained through contemporary, irreverent comparisons, which kept us all in a good mood ... it was, in many ways, a new Isolde that saw the light of day.' And there is, unbelievably, another almost lost monument – a scratchy black-and-white video of the production on tour in Osaka in 1967, available to view on YouTube. Nilsson herself has rather deflected attention from this with her criticisms of what she regarded as an unprepared Pierre Boulez and an inexperienced (in Wagner) Japanese orchestra. But this is still an essential record of a production where, as her autobiography describes, 'the role received a new dimension ... Isolde's lips speak of humiliation and revenge but her heart speaks only of love. Over Isolde's entire persona must be written, "I love you! I love you!"' Wieland described her performance of the role as 'the loving Isolde', and this film, quality notwithstanding, makes that abundantly clear. If you look at Brian Large's video of Nilsson's *Elektra* under James Levine at the Metropolitan Opera (1980) you can see all of Wieland's influence manifest itself in significant moments like the understated but emotionally overwhelming recognition of her brother Orest, demonstrated with minimal movement but with an enormous amount of expression in the eyes.

'SHE ALWAYS SAW YOUNG SINGERS AS COLLEAGUES' - Nina Stemme

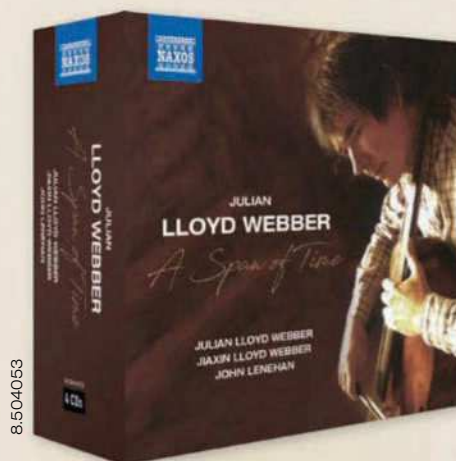
The soprano Nina Stemme, fellow Swede and successor to Nilsson today in many of her leading roles, never heard Nilsson live but was quite regularly in touch with her as her own major career was just beginning. As Stemme explains, Nilsson 'always saw young singers as colleagues, was keen on integrity and was very positive and encouraging. She was intelligent and witty and funny, and warm and suggestive if she thought you were insecure.' She particularly remembers an exchange of faxes after she had sung her first Senta in 2000, in which she had told Nilsson, 'I have probably reached my limit with this role'. Nilsson, up to speed as ever with what was happening in her profession, replied that she doubted this – and she had indeed just heard that Stemme had been offered Isolde (for Glyndebourne in 2003). 'There was no warning finger about becoming a dramatic soprano so soon!' Stemme says. Her only regret about Nilsson? 'I was stupid and should have done more about contacting her if I had only had the courage. I didn't want to impose myself or to come and see her and show off.'

So she did not take up an offer to work on Isolde at the older soprano's home in Skåne. But she did listen to her on record, the live Karl Böhm Bayreuth version. 'I was struck by her youthfulness and the brisk tempi. Also how, like in her *Turandot*, she tried to play the vulnerability. She was very loving. In Act 1 it was not "nur Hass" [only hatred] – as Rudolf Hartmann once dubbed Isolde's character in that



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With Solti in 1974 rehearsing *Salome*; and with Böhm nine years earlier, having performed the same role at the Met

act – but a hatred that came from her own love for *Tristan*. She was quite modern and very good with the text – and you have to know it well to make the non-verbal emotions clear.’ Stemme continues to feel that Nilsson is inspiring her ‘in the background with her immense power and persona’.

A SHARP WIT ON STAGE, IN RECORDINGS, AND IN PERSON

Of course not every production comes up smelling of roses in Nilsson’s memoir. Karajan’s relationship with her was, at best, ambivalent. Once, when he had sent Nilsson a detailed offer of all the roles, repertoire and periods of work for which he would need her, he received a two-word reply: ‘Busy. Birgit.’ Nilsson, characteristically, had some respect for Karajan the conductor, less for him as theatre chief and fee payer, and absolutely none for his work as stage director and lighting designer. Hence the famous episode of her joke appearance on stage for a technical rehearsal of the Met’s *Die Walküre* wearing a miner’s hat with built-in lamp.

These stories, and many others, together with a repertoire of sharp one-liners that almost rivals Sir Thomas Beecham’s, can be appreciated in both the singer’s autobiography and also the vast doorstop of the newly published 100th-anniversary book, *Birgit Nilsson 100: An Homage* (Birgit Nilsson Foundation: 2018 – see page 21). They should not, however, leave the impression that Nilsson, the farmer’s daughter, became in

any way a difficult diva or prima donna – although she was always hostile to those not telling her the plain truth or trying to exploit themselves at her expense (thus her not-so-jokey listing of Met intendant Rudolf Bing as a tax dependent.) Talking to colleagues who connected with her in the profession, either through her work or their own, is to receive an impression of great warmth, affection and support.

Nilsson’s large recorded legacy becomes a little problematic to consider in the light of what she later wrote, and was quoted as

saying, about certain parts of it (a rather vituperative interview with Sam Shirakawa is reprinted in the 100th-anniversary book). Naturally, her name became synonymous with the world’s first officially recorded studio *Ring* (for Decca with the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Sir Georg Solti). The autobiography is always warm in her appreciation of Solti – who continued to be a regular live colleague both at the

When Karajan sent her an offer of all the work for which he would need her, he received a two-word reply: ‘Busy. Birgit’

Royal Opera House and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra – and her fellow singers. But she is critical of producer John Culshaw and the technical results of the *Ring* and *Salome* recordings, mocking Culshaw’s enthusiasm about being able to hear the triangle part in *Salome* and engineer Gordon Parry’s description of the Vienna Philharmonic as ‘a hundred prima donnas who wished to be heard’. ‘Possibly the Decca Boys were so taken with the idea of getting in *all* of the effects previously unheard that they temporarily forgot that opera is actually *singing* with orchestral accompaniment.’ However, then she claims: ‘Later, in transferring the recording to CD, the balance



Nilsson in 1966, wielding an axe during her classic recording of *Elektra* with Solti for Decca; and in the same role at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in May 1969

was changed. Despite the hundred prima donnas, the opera was restored to its original form. I was very happy with the result, even though it took 25 years for my criticism to be validated.' She also firmly states a preference for live recordings because 'a studio version cannot escape the danger of substituting a lovely collage for a true interpretation'.

Sony Classical's forthcoming anniversary box-set will help complete the process – long begun on the radio broadcasts from which many of its selections were first pirated – of providing contemporary live doubles for many of Nilsson's studio recordings. Despite her subsequent reservations (and, of course, a huge increase in competitive versions in the catalogue), Nilsson's 'grand slam' for Decca of dramatic soprano roles in the German repertoire – Brünnhilde, Isolde, Salome and

'She didn't have the trappings of a prima donna or the dressings of a Maria Callas' – Lady Solti

Elektra – remains one of the gramophone's most impressive and pioneering achievements; she seemingly has no problem conveying committed, textually aware and often thrilling interpretations of her main stage roles. Nilsson certainly found a way – as did the 'hundred prima donnas' – of getting the best out of, and being lifted by, Solti's sometimes manic vitality. The rival live performances are all conducted by Karl Böhm – completely alternative versions, generally more lyrical and, yes, less focused on the orchestra. One set is a man-made product absolutely of its period, the other a form of industrial espionage into what was happening in our theatres. But both are essential for hearing the work of this soprano.

Do not forget that in this sea of 'German-ness' Nilsson was also recording exciting and fulfilling versions of (in particular) *Un ballo in maschera* and *Turandot* – she relates skilfully to the characters in both. A double CD set entitled 'Ritorna vincitor' seems to be the only current way of obtaining tracks from a Decca album (conducted by Bertil Bokstedt) of Scandinavian songs which the singer particularly loved.

'SHE HAD A FANTASTIC INSTRUMENT AND THE TECHNIQUE TO USE IT' – Valerie Solti

Lady Solti comments that her husband and the soprano 'worked willingly together – he always wanted her if she was available. She had a fantastic instrument and the technique to use it. I always remember how, after a big concert in New York's Carnegie Hall, *Elektra* I think it was, she just started singing Brünnhilde's "Ho-jo-to-ho". The voice had a silvery quality, tender and wonderful.' Professionally, Nilsson was always 'focused on the job in hand. She didn't have the trappings of a prima donna or the dressings of a Callas, walking around with a big black bag and white shoes'. Physically, she was 'big, not tall – you could imagine her moving a heifer around the farm at home', and she was also 'extraordinarily natural and very funny. After she'd been [bestowed the title of] Kammersängerin in Vienna, she announced at a party in Decca's Sofiensaal flat, "Watch this", and got on the telephone. "Hier spricht Frau Kammersängerin Nilsson. Ich brauche einen Taxi". (This is Frau Kammersängerin Nilsson speaking. I need a taxi.)'

NILSSON'S FAR-REACHING LEGACY

Looking back at Nilsson's career – with the benefit of hindsight – is to see a fascinating bridge between ancient



Eldbjørg Hemsing

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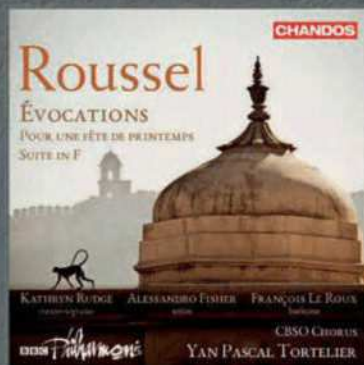
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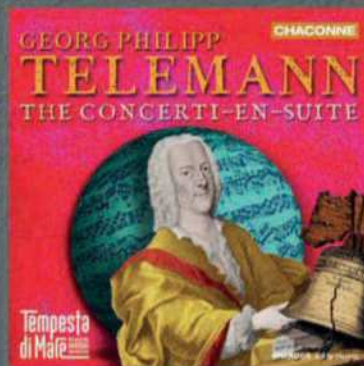


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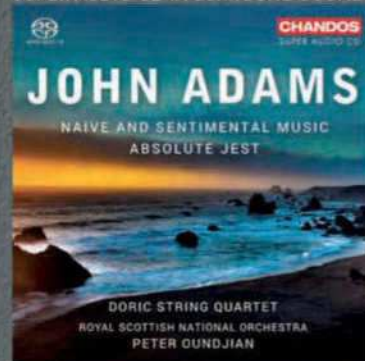
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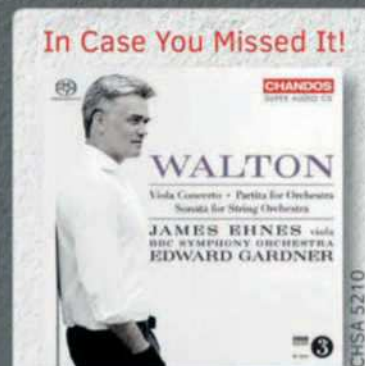


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and modern, between the carrier and employer of a great voice and a singing actress. She set the highest of vocal standards in the roles for which she is best known, bringing a groundbreaking physicality to them onstage. And despite her often rather tongue-in-cheek comments about detailed work



Soprano flying high: Birgit Nilsson on a diving board while on holiday in 1960

'Birgit Nilsson - The Great Live Recordings'



A box that, in featuring the live equivalents of many of her studio recordings, should please the collector – as it surely would have the singer herself. The 31-CD set, from Sony Classical and the Birgit Nilsson Foundation, is a heavyweight listen but essential. Here are the details of the excerpts on this month's free covermount.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1 Puccini Turandot – 'Figlio del cielo! The Metropolitan Opera / Stokowski (1961)</p> <p>2 Bartók Duke Bluebeard's Castle – 'Ach! Blumenpracht! (sung in German) Swedish RSO / Fricsay (1953)</p> <p>3 Wagner Lohengrin – 'Euch Lüften, die mein Klagen' Bayreuth Festival / Jochum (1954)</p> <p>4 Wagner Die Walküre – 'Du bist der Lenz' Bayreuth Festival / Knappertsbusch (1957)</p> <p>5 Wagner Die Walküre – 'Als Fricka den eig'nen Sinn dir entfremdet' The Metropolitan Opera / Karajan (1969)</p> | <p>6 Wagner Siegfried – 'Nacht umbangt ... Ewig war ich' Bayreuth Festival / Suitner (1967)</p> <p>7 Wagner Tristan und Isolde – 'War Morold dir so wert' Bayreuth Festival / Sawallisch (1957)</p> <p>8 Wagner Tristan und Isolde – 'Dein Werk? O tör'ge Magd! Vienna State Opera / Böhm (1967)</p> <p>9 R Strauss Salome – 'Er ist schrecklich' The Metropolitan Opera / Böhm (1965)</p> <p>10 R Strauss Elektra – 'Orest! Orest! The Metropolitan Opera / Böhm (1971)</p> <p>11 R Strauss Die Frau ohne Schatten – 'Barak, ich hab' es nicht getan! Bavarian State Opera / Sawallisch (1976)</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

(Singing Lieder is like being a clock repair man; I was a house builder'), her use of text in her Strauss roles – not forgetting the Dyer's Wife (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*), her last new major undertaking – is remarkable for its dramatic awareness. Her continuing enthusiasm for her profession was exceptional. ⁶ Sony Classical's 'Birgit Nilsson - The Great Live Recordings' is out later this year (see below); Decca's 'La Nilsson' is reviewed on page 96

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Five of Nilsson's greatest roles, plus a superb compilation



R Strauss

Elektra

VPO / Sir Georg Solti
Decca (11/67)

Perhaps her single

greatest studio achievement in terms of outright passion and virtuosity – and, interestingly, the most recently learned role in her repertoire at the time of recording. It also enshrines one of her finest collaborations with Sir Georg Solti.



R Strauss

Salome

VPO / Solti
Decca (3/62)

Controversial

because of the amount of control-room/mixing-desk intervention in the sheer musical colour as recorded (and the manic intensity of the conducting) but Nilsson does sound every inch Strauss's dream of the teenage princess with the voice of an Isolde.



Wagner

Tristan und Isolde

Bayreuth Festival
Orchestra / Karl Böhm DG (1/67)

Virtually every revival of this '60s production has appeared on some recording. This is the 'official' version, made in a single year (1966) and recorded one act at a time for maximum focus and concentration. A great three-way musical interchange of conductor, soprano and tenor (Windgassen).



Wagner

Götterdämmerung

Bayreuth / Karl Böhm
Philips/Decca

No longer available

on its own, but included as part of the complete *Ring* (and also in Decca's new 'La Nilsson' collection), this is perhaps less pile-driver virtuosic than its famous Decca studio predecessor but especially moving in Nilsson's evident pain at the loss of Siegfried.



Puccini

Turandot

Rome Opera
Orchestra / Erich Leinsdorf RCA (4/61)

Nilsson noted that Puccini made her 'rich' – and she may well have got bored with standing immobile on the inevitable staircase in Act 2 – but this is one of her great roles both for sheer carrying power and her surprising vulnerability, here with her compatriot Jussi Björling as a lyrical, flexible Calaf.



'Ritorna vincitore!'

Various artists
Decca

A fine survey to download or stream, this collection includes many of Nilsson's most famous Verdi, Strauss and Wagner roles as well as Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder* and 14 songs by Grieg, Sibelius and Rangström ... as well as 'I could have danced all night'!

RECOMMENDED READING



Birgit Nilsson 100: An Homage

Edited by Rutbert Reisch

Birgit Nilsson Foundation, HB, 720pp, £100
ISBN 978-3-903153-92-9

The Foundation's anniversary book is a large and heavyweight hardback scrapbook of tributes, career details, reviews and a big photo section devoted to every one of Nilsson's stage roles. It's beautifully produced and printed, but will require a sturdy coffee table to support it!



Winter Journey

Baritone Roderick Williams tells Neil Fisher why an English translation of Schubert's *Winterreise* has the power to resonate with all audiences – in both concert halls and classrooms

Wet sleet and a bitter wind are my unpleasant companions on a trudge through East London to find Roderick Williams, who is rehearsing at a canalside studio a long walk from anywhere. There could hardly be a more appropriate soundtrack than Schubert's *Winterreise*, which the baritone has just recorded, the twist being that his *Winterreise* is actually *Winter Journey*, sung in Jeremy Sams's new English translation, a project cooked up with the pianist Christopher Glynn.

Williams is on another lonely odyssey today. We meet during his lunch break while he rehearses for the Royal Opera's *The Return of Ulysses*, in which he plays the title-role – but it is Schubert that is really monopolising him. A quest that began when John Gilhooly, Director of Wigmore Hall, asked Williams to sing all three Schubert song-cycles during the current season – *Die schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise* and *Schwanengesang* – has taken on epic dimensions. Williams has taken these Schubert masterpieces (and almost nothing else) on worldwide tours, he's blogged about the process from start to (not yet) finish, he has teamed up with several of the world's greatest accompanists, picked up the new translation along the way – and now intends to take *Winter Journey* on a roadshow through Britain's primary and secondary schools.

What's keeping him refreshed? Partly the very ambiguity seeded into the songs, particularly in the bleakest and most radical of the cycles, *Winterreise*. Sure, Williams says, today, in freezing London, it's neat to look at 'people wrapped up, their bodies set against the elements' – but the winter of *Winterreise* is more a state of mind. 'It's not as if I need to find a particular "place" to perform it,' he says. 'It's finding an absence of place.'

He points out that Schubert and Wilhelm Müller, who wrote the poems of *Winterreise*, are bewilderingly vague when it comes to the chronology, location, and narrative of the poems. Reality blurs as the protagonist appears to leave behind his (faithless?) beloved only to return to the scene of the emotional crime. 'He says he's leaving, and off he goes, and a few songs later he says he's on the outskirts of the town where he was, so you realise he's made some distance – and then six songs later he's right back outside her door! How did that happen?'

There's no answer, Williams thinks, except to explore: to do some, as he puts it, 'nerding about' with the reams of scholarship available, and to team up with musicians who have their own ideas. 'And with different pianists I often find markedly different answers to the same questions – I embrace that.'

Williams chalks it up to the 'serendipity of life' that the idea of performing and recording *Winterreise* in translation popped up at exactly the right time. His run-up to the three concerts at Wigmore Hall had been staggered so that he could learn one cycle per year. 'And the translation fell into my lap at exactly the right moment because it fell into my *Winterreise* year – right at the beginning. So I learnt it in English almost at the same time as learning it in German.'

That was a mixed blessing in some senses. 'Jeremy's translation is faithful to the spirit but not at all to the letter, so holding both of them in my brain, that's an issue. The rhyming and sentence structure are often at odds, in a way that if I load one up it will cancel out the other. But what I can take from both [versions]

'From the moment that the singer gently confides, "I came here as a stranger", this is a traveller who gets inside your head'

is the shape of the whole journey, and the shape within each song – that feeling, that emotional response, and play that in both languages.' His first complete performance of *Winterreise* was in English,

at the 2016 Ryedale Festival, and then he immediately went to Australia, where he performed the cycle in German.

It is strange that it seems like a minor act of sacrilege to perform Müller's poems in a language other than German, even though we know that at Schubertiads the composer would hear his Lieder sung in the most informal of settings, with no artifice for performers or audience to hide behind. Jeremy Sams, says Williams, is 'totally immersed in Lieder in the way that most teenagers love their pop music', but even he shrank from translating *Winterreise*, apparently because his music-loving father was completely against it. 'He told Jeremy "you can translate opera, but Lieder you have to leave well alone, because that's poetry".' After Sams's father had died, Williams explains, 'I think a bit like John Gilhooly challenging me, Christopher [Glynn] asked Jeremy if he could do this.' The result, he says, is 'an act of love, not an act of cleverness. Jeremy loves this music so much that he wants it to be immediately accessible to people not as bilingual as he is.'

And Sams's version is startlingly and vividly immediate, at least as interpreted by Williams. From the moment that the singer gently confides, 'I came here as a stranger,' this is a wintry traveller who gets inside your head. *Winter Journey* is an achievement that brings together Sams's elegant but unfussy words with the best of Williams's natural empathy as a performer in English – and, of course, the amount of effort he has put into Schubert, whether *auf Deutsch* or not. If Williams begins his *Journey* with a degree of coolness, by the time we reach 'Auf dem Flusse' ('At the River') and the baritone confides with burning grief that 'this frozen river / is everything I know', he has shown the fire under the ice.



Roderick Williams with the pianist Christopher Glynn recording Schubert's *Winterreise* in English at St Silas Church, Kentish Town, London in February 2017

A degree of snobbery, albeit of the unconscious sort, lies behind British performances of German Lieder, Williams thinks, in which often non-German singers perform German to non-German audiences. 'You sometimes hear Europeans singing [English-language] pop music and you can tell by the way they're singing they've no real idea what the words mean, but they know how the tune goes.' Both of us share a giggle about a YouTube video that has probably not permeated the lives of most *Gramophone* readers, in which a Bulgarian contestant on a *X Factor*-style TV show belts out Mariah Carey's 'Without You', singing pure nonsense instead of the actual words (Google 'Ken Lee' for this internet horror). 'It's glorious,' Williams laughs, 'but, you know, are we Lieder singers that far removed?'

He is delighted with the Sams translation because of its directness, even bluntness – all perfectly apt for poetry that may have been fetishised by some Lieder-lovers, but is actually rather basic in expression. 'Wilhelm Müller's language is, probably deliberately, very limited.' Someone showed Williams a word cloud of all of the text used in the 24 poems, in other words a schematic representation of the most frequently used vocabulary, and it proved the point. 'A lot of "snow", "heart", "pain". And the same rhymes over and over again.'

'In speaking to audiences before concerts, part of the thing I'm trying to do is open them up to talking back to me'

Yet this has come as an unwelcome surprise to some. After Williams had finished performing the cycle in English in Hull, a friend noticed that one member of the otherwise enthusiastic audience had sat through the applause with his arms folded.

'Didn't you enjoy it then?' he asked the man, who replied, 'No, it was the translation – it was so banal.' To which Williams's friend replied, 'So's the German, that's the point.' This is not the sort of reprimand that the baritone himself would issue to a punter, however. He knows and accepts that there's a sizeable chunk of an audience who want to hear him sing in German even if

they don't understand it – and don't even want to. They 'just put the translations on the floor and sit back and let it wash all over them. I could be singing in Klingon and it wouldn't make any difference to them. But maybe they are reading something off my face, from one human being to another, that makes a story to them in their own mind.'

From more self-regarding figures in the classical-music world this might come off as condescension. It doesn't from Williams, the kind of singer who, even given a platform such as the 2014 Last Night of the Proms, turned it into a cosy fireside chat. Perhaps this is because reticence, caution, even self-doubt lies behind his empathetic demeanour. At the first of his Schubert

cycles at the Wigmore, last November, the singer began his performance of *Die schöne Müllerin* with an honest speech to the crowd, asking, 'What can I possibly do with these songs that is new?' and acknowledging the oddness of tackling the work so late in his career.

'I thought it better to be upfront,' he says. 'Of all places to sing this repertoire, this is the one where I was most expecting "the aficionado", score in hand, with pencil chewed at the end, ready to tut at the slightest deviation from whatever they expect.'

He knows this is an unfair stereotype. 'It's taken me this long to work out that people come to Wigmore Hall because they want to have a great time, and want to hear music beautifully played or sung. But I've brought I've a lot of baggage on stage with me – maybe other singers don't obsess in the same way.' He thinks about it. 'But the sort of singer who's going to be attracted to this repertoire is the sort of singer who's going to be as mad as a box of frogs in the first place.'

Sharing his personal thoughts with an audience, and inviting their comments back, is also a valuable part of the process. 'In speaking to audiences before concerts part of the thing I'm trying to do is open them up to talking back to me, and saying anything they like. It's normal for us singers to do the concert, bow a few times and then head for the bar and never see any of the audience again. But actually getting to the pithy tussle of "what did you really think?" – that's exciting.' If this shows vulnerability on his part, that's part of the process. 'I think every singer is vulnerable and they express it in different ways,' he says. 'And now that I'm 50-plus, I'm happy to say, "Okay, this is me, this is it, this is as naked and as raw as I can be".'

This sort of measured thinking reflects that Williams has played the long game in his career. After studying music at Oxford University (he was a choral scholar at Magdalen College) he became a music teacher at Tiffin School in Kingston upon Thames. 'I just wasn't aware that you could pursue singing – it hadn't been explained to me that you could earn a living just by singing.' He taught for three years, with a few singing jobs along the way ('the odd *Messiah* here, a *Creation* there') until his wife gently suggested that if he was having to cancel performing gigs for the day job, maybe he'd better quit teaching completely. 'If she hadn't [said that], I'd probably never have had the courage. I'd be here with patches on my elbows and chalk dust all over me thinking "I could have been a singer, you know?".'

Arrival at Guildhall with a few more years of experience helped. Younger students would duck out of 9am coaching sessions – 'so I'd



Williams: natural empathy as a performer in English

be like, that's fine, you stay at home, I'll get the undivided attention.' The transformation he worked on at music college – and it's a lifelong project – was shifting from being the slick choral scholar with the music rattling round his brain to a more instinctive, expressive artist. 'The humbling experience at the Guildhall was meeting singers who could make me cry when they sang. I don't think anybody at Magdalen made me cry when they sang because that wasn't the job. The job was to provide music for services, to sing it, get the notes right, and when you made a mistake that was a black mark.' Ever since Guildhall, Williams says, he has been 'learning to feel, to switch off the academic, the intellectual'.

The need to emotionally commit to repertoire – whether it's song or opera – also directs his career choices. Yes, a baritone in his mid-fifties could step it up from Mozart, Britten and early music to 'meatier' roles, more ballsy parts

in Italian opera for example. Williams is cautious about that evolution – unless he really loves the music he's performing. 'I never want to just phone it in. Life is too short to spend a season on an opera that's musically or dramatically not that interesting.'

Composition, an interest since university, has also become a bigger part of his creative life. 'More people are asking me for higher profile compositions and finding the time for that is something I have to be really very disciplined about.' While at Oxford, Williams composed a children's opera, *Alice in Wonderland*, and it has had a few revivals, the most recent one requiring Williams to sit down and edit parts for hours in a hotel room in Japan, leaving only once to perform the concert he was in the country for.

Forget the Wigmore Hall aficionados, though – Williams's toughest crowd awaits him in 2019, when he and Glynn will take themselves around the UK's schools armed only with *Lieder*, on a mission to prove that Schubert can be as satisfying as Ed Sheeran. 'We'll give ourselves three weeks and we'll just dedicate it to this, going wherever they'll have us, singing as

many times as we can and trying to cover as much of the country as we can.' The idea is to emulate the BBC's Ten Pieces project and Williams is adamant that there's no intrinsic reason why *Lieder* isn't for schoolchildren – certainly not when he's performing it in Sams's straightforward translations. 'In my zeal I feel it's for anybody,' he says, and the disarming simplicity of this reply makes it sound as if the battle is already half won. **G**

► Roderick Williams's recording of *Winter Journey*, released by Signum, is reviewed on page 82



Williams and Glynn are on a mission to prove Schubert is as satisfying as Ed Sheeran



Soul SEARCHING

Andrew Nethsingha is on a mission to connect singers and listeners alike with the spiritual heart of choral music. **Martin Cullingford** meets the music director of St John's College, Cambridge

It's usually only when covering choral music that we get to explore institutions half a millennium old, as indeed St John's College, Cambridge, was seven years ago. The choir itself, however, had to wait another century or so, being founded in the Restoration era – so a more modest three-and-a-quarter centuries, then, to trace this remarkable ensemble's evolution. Yet so much of how we perceive a choir stems from its chapel, and that of St John's is Victorian; built by Sir George Gilbert Scott in Gothic-revival, it marks its 150th anniversary next year. Compared to King's College Chapel's vertiginous fan vaulting, or neighbouring Trinity's bright sense of order, St John's, like so much ecclesiastical architecture of its era, speaks softly though strongly of an intimate, inner spirituality; that perhaps of mystery as much as majesty. Despite its considerable size – it's actually the city's tallest structure – it seems to encourage a personal connection between choir and congregation. This cannot *but* inform the way we think of the choir – and, I dare say, how the choir thinks of itself. I've always thought it fitting that while King's College's big broadcast event is a celebratory Christmas carol service, for St John's it is that of Advent – a time of quiet prayer and preparation.

And it seems equally fitting that its Music Director Andrew Nethsingha – when we meet ahead of the choir's release of an album of the music of Vaughan Williams – comes across

as quietly spoken and deeply reflective. Nethsingha is now in his 11th year at St John's – if you don't count the time he spent here as organ scholar under George Guest (director from 1951 to 1991, during which time he established the choir as one of the world's pre-eminent). Leading a choir such as this – comprising both choristers from the college's school, and undergraduates – involves at the same time conducting a world-class ensemble and nurturing the musical development of children and young adults. Nethsingha, however, talks of 'the reward of taking people from the age of eight when they don't know very much – who don't necessarily know how to read an A on a staff' and turning them into leading choristers. When choosing them, 'you're very much assessing potential not ability; there are sometimes boys who come along who have been extremely well-drilled by teachers or parents, and sometime boys who come along who have had none of that.' Get it wrong, he jokes, and 'your life is a bit of nightmare for the next five years!' But through multiple auditions, with colleagues (including the organ scholars) sitting in, the choir is continually renewed. And once the decision has been made, 'it's a wonderful journey we go on together'.

Oxfordshire choirs, by their very nature, carry with them an awareness of their tradition as part of their present. 'I have a very, very strong sense of how the choir has been in the past,' agrees Nethsingha. As well as being organ scholar under Guest,

he was a pupil of Guest's successor Christopher Robinson at St George's Chapel, Windsor, before arriving at St John's, and was also, as he points out, a friend of Robinson's successor (and his own predecessor) David Hill since his student days in London in the mid-1980s. 'So I do feel there are some very distinctive qualities to the St John's choir, and I'm keen to continue those – the first thing is trying to retain the uniqueness.' A good moment, I feel, to interject with the question that all conductors probably hate: how would you define that distinctive sound?

'I think that Christopher and David and I have all tried to continue the sort of tradition and sound world that George started. Each of us, inevitably, has brought our own musical personality into the mix as well. I think there's a sort of warmth to the St John's sound, an emphasis on expressiveness and the meaning of the words, and personal communication between the singer and listener, and a kind of laid-back quality to the style.' He also cites 'the sense of a very strong bass foundation – that was a great hallmark of George's sound. You might characterise the glory of some choirs as being the top line, the soprano line pre-eminent, and the other parts becoming of slightly diminishing importance as you go down. St John's, however, is a very much a choir that's built from the bottom up – think of parallels like watching the Vienna Philharmonic New Year's Day concert, and those eight double basses at the centre – and I think that's the way harmony works. The St John's style involves a red-blooded, passionate approach, and the ability for there to be spontaneity in performance. You can get things *too* good in rehearsal, I think – there might be some ensembles that make everything so perfect that the shine has come off it by the service. You want to create an environment where actually a spark can take light in the performance and where people will move up to another gear. All three of my predecessors have shared this belief.'

Nethsingha also talks about making sure the choir isn't too hierarchical, so that all singers feel equally valued and are equally supportive of each other, and cites a recent European tour in which all 16 trebles sang solos: 'That's not the norm, but it was lovely that it happened.' And the warmth and enjoyment he tries to engender among the stalls 'permits the sound' he's after. 'Historically at St John's, although we try to aim for a high degree of technical perfection in terms of tuning, ensemble blend and all the other parameters, that's only a part of it, it's not the primary aim. It's much more about what's behind the notes, what's behind the words – especially in the Psalms.'

If that covers the sound of the choir, the Psalms turn out to be a perfect way to get closer to what Nethsingha understands as its soul. 'The Psalms are such a beautiful part of the service. The words are amazing, and the language is so poetic. These texts encompass every possible human emotion, and they give solace to people of all generations. The Psalms remind those who come to the chapel in a troubled state, for whatever reason, that actually there have been others like them in the

past.' To connect congregations with those timeless insights, Nethsingha first seeks to connect his singers. 'I love trying to make the choir think about the Psalms in a sort of contemporary and personal way, not just to recite the words unthinkingly. On Sunday we were singing Psalm 56, "Be merciful unto me O God", and I was saying to the choir: "Don't just sing it beautifully, but imagine somebody now who might be crying out for help thinking that the rest of the world despises them, like a homeless person on Green Street sleeping under a blanket – put yourself in the mind of that person as you're singing." Or if we sing Psalm 22, with its prophetic verses looking ahead to Christ's feelings on the cross – "They pierced my hands and my feet" – I'll say to the choir: "We'll just pause for a moment before that verse, and you've got to imagine, there we are at Calvary, and there is this most extraordinary scene of all time,

Christ on the cross. And think of your emotions as you sit staring up at the foot of the cross, spellbound by this, and imagine what that looks like and would feel like. And then you've got to convey that image to the congregation through your singing." It's one of the most rewarding parts of my job. Because saying that kind of thing, not only to 21-year-olds, but to nine-year-olds, has a transformative effect.'

Training a choir, he says, is 'about sowing seeds. You've given them ideas, some of which won't connect with people, but others will, and then you go off and you get your surprise, and you come

into the service and see what happens. And sometimes it can be amazing, and totally different to what had happened in rehearsal, as a result of what you'd all prepared. And the Psalms are where collective spontaneity can occur most frequently.' The point is well illustrated by the Evensong I attend later; Psalm 69, one full of particularly painful remorse, is sung in Stainer's setting with a deeply moving sense of engagement.

If context is crucial for Psalm-singing, that's very much true, too, of Vaughan Williams's Mass in G minor, the focus of the new recording. Written in 1920-21, it's a work Nethsingha feels is 'undoubtedly as important for 20th-century British liturgical music as his symphonies are in the symphonic canon'. Other works by the composer from the 1920s feature, including his Te Deum in G, written for the enthronement of Cosmo Lang as Archbishop of Canterbury, and two motets from the opening years of the decade, including 'Lord, thou hast been our refuge', an extraordinarily intense journey from darkness to joy, distilled into 10 minutes. 'There's quite an emphasis on pieces written shortly after the First World War,' says Nethsingha. 'I became more and more interested in the way that Vaughan Williams had been affected by the war, very profoundly, and you hear that in the music, in the sense of searching, trying to find meaning. And he chose these texts, like *O vos omnes*, about the Israelites yearning for their lost city of Jerusalem, as a parallel with his own yearning for a better world. The composer's experience of the war was utterly horrific, picking up body parts from the battlefield at the end of the day, and you hear that bleakness and



Andrew Nethsingha with the choristers; training a choir is 'about sowing seeds'

'Don't just sing it beautifully, but imagine somebody now who might be crying out for help thinking that the world despises them'

Birgit Nilsson 100

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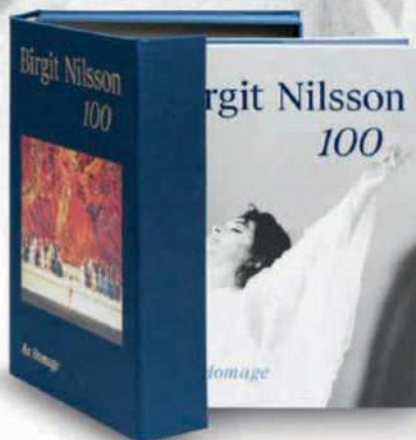


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Théâtre d'Orange, July 1973
Photo: Alain Valtat © Adagp/ Bildrecht, Vienna, 2018

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Documentary DVD: available May 2018

Book: available May 2018

SONY CD set: available September 2018

despair in the music.' As well as what Nethsingha feels is an underlying sense of spirituality to the music, there's also a strong awareness of space. This leads to a fascinating discussion about the relationship of Vaughan Williams's works to the cathedrals and chapels for which they were written. You can't recreate one acoustic in another of course, but you *can* be creative. When recording the *Agnus Dei* of the Mass, Nethsingha placed the choir in the antechapel while two soloists were right at the other end of the building by the altar, an effect he felt might evoke 'a soul floating over this forsaken battlefield, in the distance'. In the *Kyrie*, meanwhile, where 'that single alto line just emerges out of nothing, and eventually disappears into the silence of the building', he had the altos standing quite a long way away in the corner of the antechapel, facing the other direction. 'I tried to say to myself, if Vaughan Williams had been told: "You can have as many singers as you want, you can have this big building, and you can put the singers where you like" – what might he have done? I hope the composer would have approved of this way of using the building to orchestrate the music.'

And it would be fascinating to know what he'd have made of an intriguing ambition of Nethsingha's. A big supporter of commissioning student composers, he describes himself as particularly attracted to what he calls 'unusual sound worlds'. Recent examples have included works for choir and timpani, choir and double bass, and choir and marimba. But for next term a student is writing a work for choir and electronics. 'I'm keen to create more liturgical music with live electronics in the future. I suppose I partly got interested in that while we were doing the Jonathan Harvey project [when the St John's label launched in 2016, the first release focussed on Harvey's music]. I would love us to get suitable speakers permanently installed in the chapel, maybe high up. One never wants gimmicks in church – that would be entirely inappropriate in a service – but what you're trying to create is an intangible sense of spirituality. I feel that increasing the range of sounds available, and enabling them to envelop the worshipper from many directions, could enhance possibilities for the numinosity that is a goal of sacred music.'

Underlining Nethsingha's commitment to new music was the appointment last year of Michael Finnissy as Composer-in-Residence, who will write nine pieces for the college over three years. Looking further ahead, plans to mark the chapel's 150th anniversary in 2019 include the release of a recording –



The Choir of St John's College, in their Victorian, George Gilbert Scott-built chapel

'I hope Vaughan Williams would have approved of this way of using the building to orchestrate the music'

Nethsingha through their links to places he has worked – Gloucester, Truro and now St John's, including Tippett's service, written for the choir here (and which uses the organ's *trompeta real* stop – 'George Guest's pride and joy, and rightly so!').

Nethsingha shares with me his desire to explore working with the music of different faiths, to draw on the idea of music as a universal language – one which can help 'people of different

backgrounds to understand one other.' This takes us to perhaps the paradox of a collegiate chapel such as this: once at the heart of a historically Christian institution, it now sits within

an institution of extraordinary internationalism, comprising people of many different cultural and religious backgrounds. Nethsingha approaches this topic with reference to his previous posts where 'everyone agrees that at the heart of a cathedral is the daily worship, and the choir is pretty central to that. But actually a college, with its community of academics, could function perfectly well and do a great job even if there wasn't a chapel and a choir, that's the truth of the thing.' Perfectly well, perhaps, but Nethsingha passionately believes something powerful and profound would be missing. 'In our increasingly secular world, and our ever-busier, non-stop lives, with people attached to their mobile phones and updates on this and that

every minute of the day, I do think there is a greater-than-ever need for people to be able to renew themselves in an environment where time moves differently. For Christians it's obvious what that will be, but I really want to get the message out there that our chapel, and this service of Evensong, for instance, is a place where all are welcome and that it can be of great value for those of all faiths and none, whether you choose to call it spirituality or something else' – a place, indeed, where 'your mind is somehow lifted to a higher realm ... through the extraordinary beauty of the words, the architecture, the silence and the music'. **G**

St John's College's Vaughan Williams disc is released on May 18 and will be reviewed in the next issue



Nethsingha strives to create an 'intangible sense of spirituality'

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Rob Cowan welcomes vividly characterful accounts from Christian Tetzlaff and Hannu Lintu of Bartók's two violin concertos, which stand tall in a competitive field



Bartók

Violin Concertos – No 1, Sz36; No 2, Sz112

Christian Tetzlaff *vn*

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu

Ondine © ODE1317-2 (61' • DDD)

Ondine's new Bartók CD is an out-and-out winner; but, having in the past praised numerous versions of these two works, I feel it only fair to open this review by placing Christian Tetzlaff and Hannu Lintu in a proper critical context.

Viewed at a realistic perspective, when it comes to coupling Bartók's two violin concertos on the same CD there are six principal digital contenders. James Ehnes stands apart in that he adds the Viola Concerto, a bonus that in musical terms is very much to be reckoned with. His performances are warmly communicative and much aided by vivid support from the BBC Philharmonic under Gianandrea Noseda. So if you want all three works very persuasively performed, and the three-tier concerto context appeals, then there's no contest: it has to be Ehnes.

Where Ehnes takes a sweetly romantic view of the First Concerto's amatory first movement, Renaud Capuçon is more soulfully romantic, even doleful at times. But he also does well by both concertos. So too do Arabella Steinbacher and Marek Janowski: when reviewing their CD in these pages I commented how they 'offer us Bartók in 3D, the three dimensions not only spatial but emotional as well. I can't think of a version of the Second Concerto, past or present, where structure and content are more thoughtfully balanced, or where significant points in the score are more lovingly underlined.'



'In the scherzo episode, where wind and timps protest against the carping soloist, you can almost feel the music's physical impact'

I stand by that assessment but, when it comes to structure and content being thoughtfully balanced, they now have a formidable rival in Tetzlaff and Lintu. That's not forgetting Isabelle Faust and

Daniel Harding, who provide a lean, lissom and sensitively phrased option, nor Thomas Zehetmair with Iván Fischer, who are probably closest in style to the current CD under review. And of course Patricia Kopatchinskaja's Second Concerto (2013 *Gramophone* Recording of the Year, coupled with works by Eötvös and Ligeti) is chock-full of character – a real one-off.

So what makes this new release so special? Bartók's brilliantly scored Second Concerto in particular is a blend of earth and spirit, formal sophistication and phantasmagorical invention, folk-like themes and harmonic originality. These elements are securely focused by Tetzlaff and Lintu in the second movement especially, where, to call on a nature metaphor, the music suggests an exquisitely coloured hummingbird: such fragile beauty in the quieter episodes, sometimes reduced to a mere whisper (from 6'11" is pure filigree), Lintu always cueing a fine-spun accompaniment; though when the going gets tough (at 4'39" into the same movement), where wind and timps loudly protest against the carping soloist, the effect is dramatic. In the movement's central scherzo episode, from 7'16", with its tremulously dialoguing violin and percussion (fast whirring of wings?), you can almost feel the music's physical impact.

The outer movements are superb, Tetzlaff pressing forwards or cossetting the line according to the dictates of the moment. But always there's that awareness of a master colourist in the forefront; nothing is ever showy just for the sake of it, yet at 7'15" into the first movement, after Tetzlaff has reduced his tone to something barely audible,



Master colourist: Christian Tetzlaff



Fierce rhythms and affecting repose: Christian Tetzlaff and Hannu Lintu give compelling performances of Bartók's violin concertos

he rudely breaks the mood with a virtuoso flourish. Between them Tetzlaff and Lintu command a compelling and comprehensive overview of this multifaceted masterpiece, its fierce rhythms and many moments of affecting repose, not to mention its very singular emotional climate. Incidentally, Bartók's original, purely orchestral ending is used. I much prefer it.

The First Concerto is equally fine, at the very least. Listen from 7'07" into the *Allegro giocoso* second movement, a dizzying sequence of repeated phrases from Christian Tetzlaff tailed by an exultant *tutti* where Lintu and his Finnish Radio players bound in like excited kids in a playground. It's a wonderful, conspicuously Straussian moment which I often revisit on my old Isaac Stern/Eugene Ormandy recording – but Tetzlaff and Lintu are in a different league. The same is true of the whole concerto, in fact, Tetzlaff commanding a wider range of tonal colours for the

opening section of the preceding *Andante sostenuto* than almost anyone else on disc. To call on another nature metaphor, this is flora and fauna translated in terms of sound; and as the movement progresses, so the emotional tension builds commensurately.

I've said it before, but my favoured couplings for the Second Concerto are the two magnificent Rhapsodies (as played by Barnabás Kelemen under Zoltán Kocsis on Hungaroton, who also add variant versions). But Tetzlaff's account of the First Concerto elevates this work to a whole new level of musical excellence, so much so that I'm inclined to place his expertly recorded CD of the two concertos ahead of all rival versions. It's that good! **G**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Steinbacher, Suisse Romande Orch, Janowski
(11/10) (PENT) PTC5186 350

Ebnes, BBC PO, Noseda (11/11) (CHAN) CHAN10690

Faust, Swedish RSO, Harding
(A/13) (HARM) HMC90 2146

R Capuçon, LSO, Roth (4/18) (ERAT) 9029 57080-7
Zebezmair, Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (BRIL) 9436

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| DVD | DVD Video | s | subtitles included |
| Ⓜ | Blu-ray | nla | no longer available |
| Ⓜ | LP | aas | all available separately |
| | | oas | only available separately |



Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Andrew Mellor listens to Erkki-Sven Tüür's Eighth Symphony:

'He counters low, clustered sounds with dazzling, tight constellations of high trumpets, woodwinds and strings' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



Richard Wigmore joins Daniel Hope on his Mozart journey:

'The souped-up Rondo alla turca, with harpsichord as surrogate percussion, is good, lusty fun' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**

Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 2, Op 19; No 4, Op 58

Royal Northern Sinfonia / Lars Vogt *pf*

Online © ODE1311-2 (62' • DDD)



Lars Vogt would seem to have kept the best until last in this series of

Beethoven concerto recordings with the Royal Northern Sinfonia. For here, surely, are the finest of the concertos, more at ease with themselves than the structurally inhibited First and Third concertos, more concerto-like than the mighty *Emperor*, whose creation post-dates Beethoven's life as a performing virtuoso. What we experience in the Second and Fourth concertos is Beethoven the improvising virtuoso working hand-in-glove with his alter ego, Beethoven the visionary and seer; and it's this very conjunction which Vogt and his fellow musicians explore in what are as imaginatively alert realisations of the two concertos as I have heard in many a long year.

The playboy roisterings of the 25-year-old's B flat Concerto (No 2) have often caused the work to be underestimated; yet one need only consider such things as the recitative *con gran espressione* 18 bars from the slow movement's end to realise that this is no idle jest. Vogt has one previous recording of the concerto to his name, made with Rattle and the CBSO in 1995. Inspiring as that was, this newer version has about it a lightness of touch and improvisatory grace – a sense of the music being caught expeditiously on the wing – that gives it a decisive edge over the Birmingham recording.

That interaction of seer and improvising virtuoso is even more necessary if the great G major Concerto is to mesmerise as it should. Here again Vogt and his musicians are in prime form in a performance that is sharp-

witted and endlessly beguiling, albeit platinum-tipped where the need arises. Pianistically, Vogt's playing looks back via Glenn Gould (his magical but often infuriatingly mannered 1961 New York recording with Leonard Bernstein) to Artur Schnabel, whose playing of the first of Beethoven's two first-movement cadenzas has exactly the kind of improvisatory skill that Gould's has and Vogt's too.

Though Vogt has all the resources of a modern Steinway at his command, and isn't afraid to use them, there is a filigree quality to the playing that is subtly different from the 'classic' pianism of such revered interpreters of the concerto as Solomon or Emil Gilels, where every note is finely centred, even as the gradations of tone rise and fall. ('Like strings of pearls', as our grandparents used to say.) Vogt deploys a rather more various touch, just as he and his players are not afraid to slow the pulse or elasticate a phrase in moments of visionary wonder.

I confess that when I first heard the performance I thought 'this will never do': for repeated hearings, that is. Yet the more I have returned, the more I have wondered. Even the deft arpeggiation of the concerto's opening chord – a no-no in any other context – now seems apt.

It's perhaps no coincidence, given that Vogt is currently Music Director of the Royal Northern Sinfonia, that the rapport between the soloist and this highly accomplished band of musicians is everything it should be, and more. These are marvellous performances, and the recordings, derived from live performances at Sage Gateshead, serve them well.

Richard Osborne

Piano Concerto No 2 – selected comparison:

Vogt, CBSO, Rattle (3/97) (EMI/WARN) 372462-2

Piano Concerto No 4 – selected comparisons:

Solomon, Philb Orch, Cluytens (2/54⁸) (TEST) SBT1220

Gilels, Philb, Ludwig (4/58⁸) (EMI/WARN) 993721-2

Gould, NYPO, Bernstein (4/93⁸) (SONY) 88725 41288-2

Schnabel, Chicago SO, Stock (6/17⁸) (RCA) 88985 38971-2

Bernstein • Korngold

Bernstein Serenade (after Plato's 'Symposium')^a

Korngold Violin Concerto, Op 35^b

Liza Ferschtman *vn*

^aHet Gelders Orkest / Christian Vázquez;

^bPrague Symphony Orchestra / Jiří Malát

Challenge Classics © CC72755

(58' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the ^aMusis, Arnhem, Netherlands, June 9 & 13, 2017;

^bFelberabendhaus der BASF, Ludwigshafen, Germany, November 22-23, 2017



Liza Ferschtman's Mendelssohn coupling (5/17) sounded astonishingly fresh

but her mid-20th-century follow-up is something of a curate's egg: two more or less American works captured live (faintly tepid applause is retained) and only one a winner.

Given that the piece is routinely accused of excessive sentimentality it's difficult to understand why performers risk taking the first movement of the Korngold at such a dreamy *Moderato*. You may think the nostalgic idiom can take it – the silver-toned soloist obviously feels the music this way – but it must be a weakness that the *Romanze* can only prolong the mood. While Ferschtman attempts to play up internal contrasts there, the finale provides the real wake-up call. Though plainly the weakest part of the score, she has looked at it afresh, often opting for a flintier style of articulation to restore some strength of purpose. For me at least this recovery of energy comes a little late.

Bernstein's suddenly ubiquitous Serenade receives a more central interpretation, assisted by the natural results achieved by Northstar Recording Services on familiar turf. Even if the orchestral image is comparably recessed with surround sound in mind, the soloist's upfront laser-like timbre is



Visionary wonder: Lars Vogt directs the Royal Northern Sinfonia from the keyboard in vivid and imaginative accounts of Beethoven concertos

suddenly a pristine delight and there's greater interaction with the band. Ferschtman is one of a generation of violinists for whom Bernstein's sometimes ungainly writing for the instrument holds no terrors. Having stepped in at the last minute to perform the work with Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra in New York in 2013, she has kept it at the heart of her repertoire. All concerned respond to its moods with the utmost sensitivity, evoking the *Symposium's* varieties of love with a refinement that eludes bigger names and might have surprised the composer too. Ferschtman's intonation is well-nigh flawless. **David Gutman**


Borgström • Shostakovich

Borgström Violin Concerto, Op 25

Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1, Op 77

Eldbjørg Hemsing *vn*

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Olari Elts

BIS (F)  BIS2366 (74' • DDD/DSD)



It was only a matter of time before Eldbjørg Hemsing, a big star in her native Norway,

followed her sister Ragnhild into the commercial recording studio. Less prone to genre crossing but just as marketable, she produces a tensile, vibrant tone from her Guarneri instrument, ideally suited to big-hearted Romantic fare. Shostakovich makes different demands and when the orchestra is Austrian, the conductor Estonian and the label Swedish we can perhaps scarcely expect the last word in timbral authenticity. Hemsing's rendition still trumps that of Leticia Moreno, who makes a less technically secure appeal to her Spanish fanbase despite enjoying the support of Yuri Temirkanov and the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. If the Viennese can sound less than ideally involved, BIS's bright focus on the solo violin may be partly to blame. Vibrato-heavy in her overlit opening Nocturne and similarly impassioned in the great Passacaglia movement, Hemsing is nonetheless more conventional in terms of tempo and text than Frank Peter Zimmermann on the same label. After a cadenza that generates considerable heat she is content to let the orchestra introduce the finale on its own. The blistering denouement may or may not compensate for the dearth of introspection.

The unexpected coupling, considerably more than a makeweight

and actually placed first on the disc, exerts a rather different appeal. I should mention that it dates from 1914 and has been recorded once before by an all-Scandinavian team offering more by the same composer. There are initial hints of something more harmonically adventurous (Sibelius or Strauss) but Hjalmar Borgström (1864-1925), a critic by trade, was disinclined to experiment when it came to his own music. A recorded sound that limits the kind of visceral orchestral attack needed in the Shostakovich bathes Borgström's ultra-conservative Scandi-Bruch in an appropriate glow. It's not music you remember much once it stops: there's no disguising the fact that Grieg was a more potent melodist. However, with advocacy as ardent as this, the overall impression is very positive. The soloist says the concerto reminds her of home. It will strike most listeners as unwaveringly German. **David Gutman**

Shostakovich – selected comparisons:

Moreno, St Petersburg PO, Temirkanov

(6/15) (DG) 481 1338

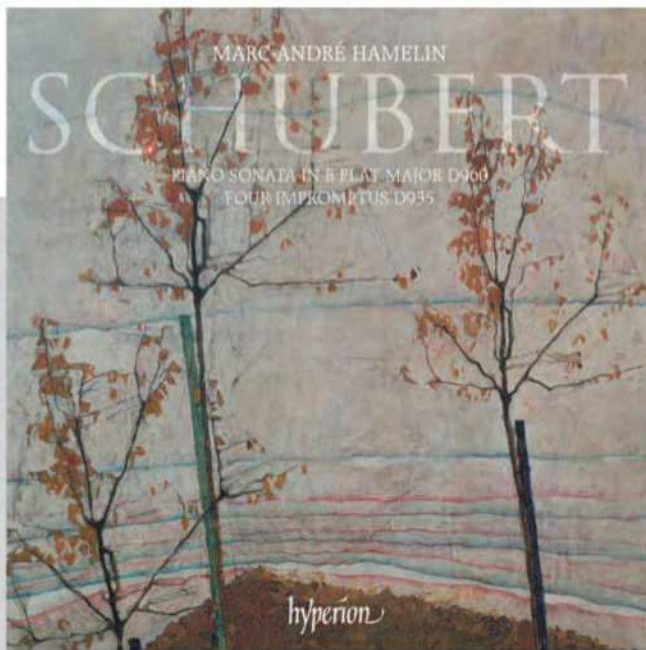
FP Zimmermann, NDR Elbphilh, Gilbert

(2/17) (BIS) BIS2247

Borgström – selected comparison:

Båtstrand, Norrlands Op SO, Hansen (SIMA) PSC1311

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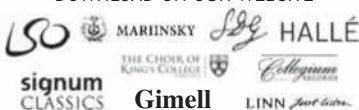
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Bruckner

Symphony No 1 (1868 Linz version, ed. Röder)

Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

Video director **Andreas Morell**

C Major Entertainment (DVD 744608;

744704 (56' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Munich, September 6, 2017



Although the outer sleeve and booklet note make no mention of it, this is the first recording of the International

Bruckner Society's new edition of the First Symphony. It also happens to be Christian Thielemann's first recording of the symphony, as well as the first version of the work available on video. Prepared by Dr Thomas Röder, the new edition is based on the orchestral parts used for the symphony's premiere in Linz in 1868. By contrast, the Linz editions prepared by Haas and Nowak, which refer to the symphony's original completion date of 1866, are actually based on revisions made by Bruckner in Vienna in 1877. The new edition therefore represents a welcome tidying-up of the previously misleading nomenclature, albeit with the downside of adding yet another symphony version to the already crowded Bruckner pool. In practice, the differences between the 1868 and 1877 versions are relatively minor and largely confined to the final movement. One of the more conspicuous differences is the addition of trumpets in the very last bars of the 1877 version, which I feel closes the symphony in a more satisfying way than the scoring found in the 1868 version.

Thielemann's performance, which he conducts from memory, is powerful and energetic. There are a few moments where the ensemble isn't as clean as one might expect from an orchestra of this calibre, but the playing is impassioned and, in the *Adagio*, luminously beautiful. The video direction by Andreas Morell features very close-up shots of the players interspersed with middle-distance views of Thielemann and remote views of the orchestra from the upper rear of the hall. Seeing the commitment of the players from close up adds to the excitement of the performance, especially in the finale, although Morell's choices occasionally leave something to be desired. For example, in the passage marked *dolce* in the second subject of the first movement (from 3'15"), I'd have preferred to have seen the solo instruments that are so eloquently playing rather than

the view we get of Thielemann conducting and the violins preparing for their next entry. The picture quality is excellent, however, and the sound is weighty and full while retaining transparency in climaxes. With less than 50 minutes of actual music, the disc is rather short measure, but at present it has the video field entirely to itself. **Christian Hoskins**

Copland

'Copland Conducts Copland'

Clarinet Concerto^a. Fanfare for the Common Man. Rodeo - Hoedown. El Salón México.

The Tender Land - Suite^b

^aBenny Goodman c/ ^bLos Angeles Master Chorale;

Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra /

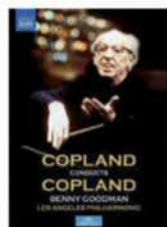
Aaron Copland

Video director **Kirk Browning**

Naxos (DVD 2 110397; NBD0068V

(59' • NTSC • 4:3 • 1080i • PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Music Center, Los Angeles, 1976



Copland was 75 when this short but attractive concert with the Los Angeles Philharmonic was filmed for the long-running PBS arts series *Great Performances*. The video shows Copland as a precise, energetic and alert conductor, smiling happily at the orchestra after each piece and enjoying himself enormously in the performance of the Hoedown from the ballet *Rodeo*. It's a great watch, and a rewarding listen as well.

As with his studio recording of the *Fanfare for the Common Man* with the London Symphony Orchestra, Copland's interpretation is focused more on presenting the work's nobility and strength of purpose than its dramatic impact. The playing of the LA Phil's brass is excellent, the trumpets at the start especially precise and gleaming. There's also some fine solo playing in the engaging account of *El Salón México* which follows.

The performance of the Clarinet Concerto features Benny Goodman, who commissioned the work from Copland almost three decades earlier and gave the first performance. Goodman doesn't seem entirely at ease with the elegiac first movement here but the faster-paced second movement comes off extremely well, and Copland draws especially expressive playing from the strings.

Copland's lively interpretation of Hoedown makes one regret the absence of the other three movements of *Rodeo* from the concert but compensation comes

in the form of the rarely performed suite from the even more rarely performed opera *The Tender Land*. The ardent performance of the first movement, 'Introduction and Love Music', is extremely moving, while the characterful singing of the Los Angeles Master Chorale gives the following two movements, 'Party Scene' and 'Finale: The Promise of Living', a very different feel to the purely orchestral account that Copland recorded with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1959. It's an unjustly neglected piece, as Copland was no doubt keen to demonstrate in this excellent performance.

The video direction is in the safe hands of Kirk Browning, whose early work with Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra set the scene for a decades-long career providing arts coverage for American television. Browning keeps the camera moving but he knows what to show and when to show it. The 1970s video image suffers from some horizontal banding and general smudginess but the soundtrack is in stereo and sounds good, with only a smidgen of tape hiss.

Christian Hoskins

Dvořák • Smetana

Dvořák Symphony No 9, 'From the New World', Op 95 B178. Othello, Op 93 B174. Gypsy Songs, Op 55 B104 - Songs My Mother Taught Me^a.

Rusalka - Oh, it's useless^a; Polonaise; Song to the Moon^a Smetana Dalibor - How confused I feel^a

^aKristine Opolais sop Leipzig Gewandhaus

Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

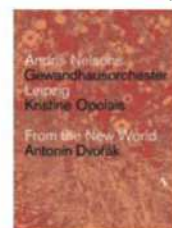
Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus (DVD ACC20419; ACC10419

(101' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS56.1

& PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live, May 2017



This concert was recorded in May 2017, following the announcement that Andris Nelsons would

succeed Riccardo Chailly as music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Dvořák's *New World* Symphony is the programme's centrepiece, as it was in a December 2010 concert Nelsons gave with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, released on CD by BR-Klassik (7/13) and on DVD by Unitel/C Major (10/13). That Munich performance has a special charm, particularly on video. Nelsons beams at the Bavarian players, smiling even when the music is dead serious. Any questions raised about the liberties he takes with

tempo and phrasing are swept away by his obvious and sincere joy in music-making.

This Leipzig concert is a different story. Curiously, Nelsons conducts from the score (he led from memory in Munich), and scowls at least as much as he smiles. Perhaps this wouldn't matter as much if this new interpretation felt as fresh, but the seemingly spontaneous emotional underlining of detail in his BRSO account sounds exaggerated here, as if he felt it necessary to also italicise and mark in bold. The result is dizzyingly episodic; and while some of the episodes are riveting in their own right – the Mahlerian march in the middle of the slow movement, for instance, with the winds singing in plaintive desolation over pizzicato basses – it just doesn't hold together.

Whatever misgivings I have about Nelsons's interpretative choices, the commitment of the Leipzig players is never in doubt. The famous cor anglais solo in the *Largo* is phrased with tender simplicity, but elsewhere Nelsons allows the woodwinds to play with tremendous freedom and they clearly relish the opportunity. The strings retain their trademark silkiness in *piano* passages yet dig in ferociously at *fortissimo*, occasionally taking on an uncharacteristically febrile tone.

The programme opens with a forthright reading of the *Othello* overture and a series of Czech songs and arias featuring soprano Kristine Opolais, whose reedy tone is well suited to this repertoire. She's a fine musician, too – note how she makes dramatic use of the uneven phrase-lengths in the aria from *Dalibor*.

And if one trusts in the Shakespearean saw that all's well that ends well, the *Slavonic Dance* played as an encore concludes the concert on a high, quiet note of bittersweet melancholy.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Ferneyhough

Liber scintillarum^a. *Plötzlichkeit*^b.

Missa brevis^c. *La terre est un homme*^d

^bOlivia Robinson, ^bJennifer Adams-Barbaro *sops*

^bCherith Millburn-Fryer *contr* ^cExaudi / James Weeks; ^aensemble recherche; ^bBBC Symphony Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

NMC © NMCD231 (68' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at ^cOrford Church, Suffolk, June 10, 2006; ^bdBarbican Hall, London, February 26, 2011;

^aBöllenfalltorhalle, Darmstadt, July 22, 2012



In his booklet note, Paul Griffiths suggests that Brian Ferneyhough's music

might be heard as a corrective (even a wake-up call?) to that mind-numbing uniformity which arguably pervades Western culture. Indeed, this new release from NMC assuredly bolsters such an argument.

Inclusive, too, in offering a viable overview of this composer's output. *Missa brevis* (1969) finds Ferneyhough in his mid-twenties absorbing progressive vocal techniques as he evolves a personal approach. The *Kyrie* and *Gloria* abound in hallmarks from Xenakis, Ligeti and Nono, with later movements (not least the austere syllabic 'Hosanna') more individual in vocal treatment. Exaudi sound at ease with its demands, not least the airy vocalise ending the *Agnus Dei*. Three decades later, *Liber scintillarum* (2012) takes its cue from an eighteenth-century French manuscript for a 'chamber concerto' whose fragments progress from hectic activity to a settled discourse before disintegrating into gestures riven by silence. A coming into focus, then moving beyond it, which Ensemble Recherche realise with keen virtuosity.

Also featured are two of Ferneyhough's orchestral works (the earliest, *Firecycle Beta*, can be accessed on YouTube). *La terre est un homme* (1979) remains best known for the controversy around its early performances – but, for all its overt complexity, this is music whose utopian outlook incites players and listeners to experience being 'on the edge' of a musical trajectory whose panache is as evident as its pathos. *Plötzlichkeit* (2006) might be the music of a more pragmatic figure, yet Ferneyhough is no less intent in shaping the orchestra his way. Three female vocalists are embedded in the texture and several instruments drawn from the brass band, so facilitating the sense of a sound-mass evolving over myriad sections, and whose manner of transition, sudden and laconic by turns, provokes and entertains in like measure.

In the latter pieces the BBC SO never shirk that lightness of touch which makes listening a pleasure, while Martyn Brabbins directs with calm authority and, above all, a belief in this music's potency. Ferneyhough's 75th birthday could not have been more fittingly marked.

Richard Whitehouse

Gál

Concertino for Cello and String Orchestra, Op 87^a. Solo Cello Sonata, Op 109^a. Solo Cello Suite, Op 109^b

Matthew Sharp *vc*

^aEnglish Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Woods
Avie © AV2380 (68' • DDD)



By my reckoning this is the 15th Avie recording to feature the music of Hans

Gál and, despite its worth, there's no doubting the label's musicians and producers – Kenneth Woods and Simon Fox-Gál the most tireless among them – got to the meatier works first. Woods argues in his lucid booklet note that there's 'nothing frivolous' about the Cello Concertino but this is undeniably a lighter piece than the multi-layered, whimsical and tragic Concerto of 21 years earlier. Gál's 1965 Concertino, recorded for the first time here, is a work of consistent shape and at times of distinctive Viennese urgency; but its reflection of Gál's characteristic oscillation between darkness and light is altogether simpler and its finale is really just a serenade. Matthew Sharp plays with attractive cleanliness in all three movements but the ESO strings can sound thin and untidy.

Anyone writing in this resolutely Romantic style in 1965 was clearly in a world of their own. But Gál's Sonata for Solo Cello, written 17 years later, born of the same harmonic rulebook but stripped of luscious harmonies by virtue of its scoring, can feel altogether more edgy, muddy and determined. Sharp's performance, up to the probing final *Vivace*, is similarly clean but emotionally driven. Could it have been captured in one take? The sound of his modern cello by Robin Aitchinson has something very fresh and unburdened about it.

Gál's Suite for Solo Cello was dedicated to Simon Fox-Gál – cellist, producer (of this recording and most of its companions) and the composer's grandson. These virtuoso dance movements are at once studied and inspired, seasoned with occasional contrapuntal complications but filled with flair at the same time. They are never dry under Sharp's fingers; he communicates the physical gait of each idea, particularly in the second-movement shift from tight *Alla marcia* to singing *Allegro moderato*. The Rondino can get a little caught up in itself but Sharp argues the Suite's case as the best piece on the disc. Andrew Mellor

Handel

Concerti a due cori, HWV332-334

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra /

Gottfried von der Goltz, Petra Müllejeans

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5272 (49' • DDD)



On the face of it, Handel's three *Concerti a due cori* – by which he meant

for two orchestras – ought to be as popular as the *Water Music* or the *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. With a similar sound-palette of strings, oboes, bassoons and horns, they inhabit the same world of joyous entertainment music, and there is no significant difference in Handelian quality. Neither can the fact that they are mostly arrangements of vocal numbers from the operas and oratorios be a reason for less attention from performers; snootiness over Handel's recycling is wasted effort, and anyway what orchestral musician would not want to play 'And the glory of the Lord' or 'Lift up your heads'?

This music, then, is gorgeous, friendly Handel from beginning to end, and maybe therein lies its Cinderella status. Composed to be played during the intervals of his oratorio performances, perhaps the concertos are a bit too relentlessly cheerful. I remember in the 1990s British Airways used to pipe the Op 3 concertos in the cabin as you taxied out but, presumably to keep you in an optimistic frame of mind,

omitted the slow movements. A fine *Andante larghetto* in Concerto No 3 and a gentle siciliana in No 2 notwithstanding, there's a similar feeling of over-positivity here too, as if you were being offered one of those packets of wine gums that only includes reds and blacks.

The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra are predictably assured performers of these pieces; the horns chortle and soar, there is some expert running oboe-playing in the last movement of No 2, the bass-lines buzz with intensity and overall the sound surges and sings. Compared to the almost-as-well-executed 1997 recording by Tafelmusik it is a touch opaque, and indeed the relative transparency and delicacy of the Canadians' performance, together with a slightly stronger sense of storytelling, make it a strong alternative. But you wouldn't be going wrong with either. **Lindsay Kemp**

Selected comparison:

Tafelmusik, Lamon (10/98^h) (TAFE) TMK1011CD

Haydn

'London' Symphonies – No 93^a;

No 94, 'Surprise'^b; No 95^c; No 96, 'Miracle'^a;

No 97^a; No 98^d; No 99^e; No 100, 'Military'^e;

No 101, 'Clock'^f; No 102^g; No 103, 'Drumroll'^d;

No 104, 'London'^b

Heidelberg Symphony Orchestra /

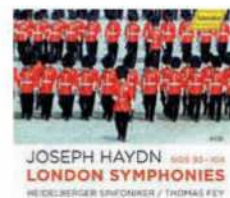
^{abcdeg}**Thomas Fey, Benjamin Spillner** *vn*

Hänssler Classic © ④ HC16001 (5h 4' • DDD)

Recorded 1999-2015. From ^bCD98 340,

^cCD98 265, ^eCD98 582 (11/12), ^eCD98 595 (11/10),

^eCD98 014 (1/14), ^dCD98 031 (11/14)



Thomas Fey and his Heidelberg band launched their Haydn symphony

survey in 1999 with a disc of the *Surprise* and *London* Symphonies. These set the template for much of what was to follow: vivacious, minutely considered readings in which every sound, every gesture had been rethought anew. Strings tore into *allegros*; horns were treated as far more than just sustaining instruments; trumpets spat out minatory fanfares; the timpanist was often encouraged to extemporise beyond his written part. Speeds were often extreme – not least in some almost laughably swift minuets, which contrasted with exaggeratedly slow trios. No fermata was left unelongated, no Haydnesque trick left unitalicised. Over the following 15 years, Fey managed to thrill with his chutzpah at the same time as frustrating with his tendency to micromanage.

Fey was forced to withdraw from conducting a few years ago and his

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Distributed in the UK by RSK Entertainment / in the USA by Naxos

SODEC
Québec

Canada

concertmaster, Benjamin Spillner, stepped in for a tribute disc of Symphonies Nos 35, 46 and 51 (8/17). Spillner repeats his role in No 101, recorded here to complete Fey's traversal of the 12 'London' Symphonies. It's good to revisit them for their individuality and the single-mindedness with which they have been directed.

As to the new *Clock* itself, it's less wilful than some of the others but displays, in the outer movements, the knife-edge string-playing and searing brass tone that has become this series' trademark. Nothing eccentric about the *Andante* that gives the work its name, played fairly metronomically at just a touch under crotchet=60. There's no temptation to correct Haydn's 'wrong' notes in the Trio either.

Five hours spent with these 12 works – the apogee of the 18th-century symphony – is a pleasure from beginning to end. Fey and Spillner will often challenge, occasionally expasperate but certainly never bore you. You may prefer the urbanity of Colin Davis with the Concertgebouw, the earthier sound of Eugen Jochum with the LPO, the revisionism of Roger Norrington in Stuttgart, the period sounds of Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre live in Vienna or even old standards like Beecham. But don't ignore Fey, whose 'London' Symphonies deserve a place among all these classic sets. **David Threasher**

Selected comparisons:

RPO, Beecham

(12/58^R, 11/60^R) (EMI/WARN) 367893-2 or 984603-2

LPO, Jochum (11/72^R, 11/73^R) (DG) 474 364-2

Concertgebouw Orch, Davis

(7/92^R) 442 611-2PM2 and 442 614-2PM2

SWR RSO, Stuttgart, Norrington

(3/10) (HANS) CD93 252

Musiciens du Louvre, Minkowski (9/10) (NAIV) V5176

Hindemith

Concert Music for Strings and Brass, Op 50.

Nobilissima Visione – Suite. Symphonic

Metamorphosis on Themes by Carl Maria

von Weber

WDR Symphony Orchestra / Marek Janowski

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 672 (58' • DDD/DSD)



I'd have to agree with Guy Rickards's assertion that Hindemith's *Symphonic*

Metamorphosis is the most immediately attractive of his orchestral works. But Hindemith really only gets you with those surface jazz hands so he can hook you into the riddle of what's going on underneath: Weber's themes plundered not so much

for how they sound as what they do mathematically – how they can mutate, overlay, refract and so on. When you think it's a geometric trick, it might actually be a rhythmic one. Vice versa. It says something that the nearest Hindemith got to a showpiece is also such a structural tease. The biggest challenge to performers is in remaining true to the score's written-in clarity, and it's one met by Janowski and the orchestra here.

Hindemith's suite of three movements from his St Francis of Assisi-inspired ballet *Nobilissima Visione* is a different proposition, especially when divorced from the dancing it maps with equal clarity. The first movement's reflection of 'a feast of dry bread and water' tells all about the music's austerity and, despite the brains at work in the Passacaglia, the movement surely gets too heavy too quickly. This is a 'grey-scale' performance and that's meant as a compliment (it's a far trickier sound to effect than garish Technicolor).

As for the pitting of winds against strings in Hindemith's *Concert Music*, Op 50, written for Koussevitzky's Boston Symphony Orchestra, it needs a degree more charisma in its 'very fast with force' opening – and higher-resolution strings – than it gets from Janowski's forces here. The broad second section of this first part is far more affecting, as is the work's second part. But to quibble once more, with the brass so full of snarl and snap – and Pentatone's sound underlining the antiphonal confrontation – the strings could have used an ounce more attitude or a leg-up from the engineers. Don't let those gripes steer you away from a revealing combination of absorbing works. **Andrew Mellor**

Korngold

Symphonic Serenade, Op 39.

Sextet, Op 10 (arr Rohde)

NFM Leopoldinum Orchestra / Hartmut Rohde

CPO (P) CPO555 138-2 (62' • DDD)



Some exaggerated claims have been made for Erich Korngold's extra-cinematic

output but here are two of his finer works performed with enthusiasm and commitment. The *Symphonic Serenade* is the surprise inclusion, CPO's second recording of a piece rarely touched by concert planners or record companies since its unveiling by Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic in 1950. The more familiar *Sextet* is a product of the

composer's teenage years when he was widely regarded as a second Mendelssohn. At the time of its 1917 premiere Korngold's own voice was deemed unmistakable and by no means old hat.

So what's not to like? The main issue is one of scale, for all that Hartmut Rohde, most familiar to record buyers as the Mozart Piano Quartet's viola player, effects necessary adjustments with sensitivity. Wrocław's NFM Leopoldinum Orchestra, of which he was artistic director between 2014 and 2017, is only twentyish strong – too small for the *Symphonic Serenade*, too big for the *Sextet*. Surprisingly, it's Werner Andreas Albert and the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie who allocate the *Serenade*'s glorious opening melodic line to solo violin alone. Thereafter the interpretations diverge as you might expect. Rohde exposes the spikier inner workings of Korngold's invention. Albert's larger forces luxuriate in its nostalgic warmth. The one version of the *Serenade* that is truly epic in scope, from Simone Pittau and the LSO (ASV, 2/07), would seem to have vanished from the lists.

Both featured works have generally high-spirited cyclical finales whose tendency to run on empty is countered here by a certain edginess. But then there are moments not so much transparent as wiry or emaciated throughout. As Brendan G Carroll notes in the booklet, the *Serenade* 'requires the utmost accuracy and precision in intonation from every player'. Though well worth sampling, these vivid renditions are not quite what Korngold would have imagined in his mind's ear. Nor is the astringent character of the music-making muted by plentiful hall resonance. Safer (duller?) recommendations are listed below.

David Gutman

Serenade – selected comparisons:

NWD Philb, Albert (10/91^R) (CPO) CPO999 150-2

BBC PO, Bamert (3/97^R) (CHAN) CHAN10433

Sextet – selected comparison:

Doric Qt, Stumm, LaFollette (5/12) (CHAN) CHAN10707

Mahler

Symphony No 9

Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Daniel Harding

Harmonia Mundi (P) HMM90 2258 (83' • DDD)



The gently irregular pulse at the outset of this *Andante comodo* bodes well for a

Ninth which doesn't lean on biographical signifiers as markedly as vaunted recordings from years gone by: it's the opening page

of a symphony, not a diary. There's no denying the harmonic agony and violent momentum Harding wrings from the subsequent D minor climaxes and implosions but he balances them persuasively in the context of countervailing D major episodes of genuine aspiration and tenderness, so that the movement's hard-won point of repose feels less than usually provisional.

So it's the kind of account that leaves the parodic and Expressionist elements of Mahler's vocabulary to speak for themselves. In the Ländler they're leavened by idiomatic touches of Schubertian *Gemütlichkeit*, and resilient if two-faced Waltz-King humour from the clarinets at the start of the Rondo-Burleske (the Viennese didn't need Ravel; they could always parody themselves). In the Ninth no less than any other symphony Mahler looked back at least as often as forwards: Harding is unfailingly sensitive to the work's place in time.

Some readers may remember the lingering, at times otherworldly performances of the Ninth which Harding gave with the Dresden Staatskapelle (broadcast and on tour) a little over a decade ago. They will find the present performance and its recording no less attentive but considerably less extreme, more of a piece with the thrilling, score-based sweep of a Second given by these forces at the BBC Proms in 2015. This is especially true of a nobly sung final *Adagio* distinguished by sweetly modulated strings and with intimations of extinction kept in reserve for the final page. **Peter Quantrill**

Mendelssohn

Symphonies – No 4, 'Italian', Op 90;

No 5, 'Reformation', Op 107

NDR Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Hanover / Andrew Manze

Pentatone ㉔ ㉕ PTC5186 611 (64' • DDD/DSD)



How is the weather on the Italian leg of the Grand Tour? For John Eliot Gardiner

the Mediterranean sun streams down, sharpening the contours of the landscape and glinting off the azure sea. Thomas Fey, on the other hand, finds angry storm clouds threatening and the scirocco whipping up the dust from the streets. Andrew Manze's Neapolitan journey is somewhere in the middle: perhaps closer to Gardiner's sunshine but slightly occluded, as if blunted by a light mist blowing in from the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Perhaps it's the generous acoustic of the Grosser Sendesaal of the NDR Landesfunkhaus in Hanover, where these recordings were made. Nevertheless, despite some pinpoint string-playing and lovely, rounded woodwind solos, the focus that's such a feature of those other performances isn't quite there. Speeds are a notch or two down on the comparison discs, so the closing saltarello doesn't fizz with the manic energy of Gardiner or Fey. It's a fine performance on its own terms but it isn't the effusion of joyful energy that it might be.

As we travel back from Catholic southern Italy to Lutheran Augsburg, we find that Manze's approach and the Hanover acoustic suit the sterner *Reformation* better, and this performance adopts the woodwind 'Recitativo' before the flute leads into the *Feste Burg* peroration, as did Yannick Nézet-Séguin in his cycle. Mendelssohn had doubts about both symphonies but this pairing should amply prove him wrong. (Check out Gardiner's recording of the revised version of the *Italian* to demonstrate how the composer's first thoughts were far superior to his second.) Nevertheless, for all this music has to offer, Gardiner in Vienna (not to mention Gardner in Birmingham), Fey in Heidelberg and Nézet-Séguin in Paris are the ones to prefer. **David Thresher**

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

VPO, Gardiner (5/99) (DG) 459 156-2GH

CBSO, Gardner (2/14) (CHAN) CHSA5132

COE, Nézet-Séguin (9/17) (DG) 479 7337GH3

Heidelberg SO, Fey (HANS) HC16098

Mozart • Rachmaninov

Mozart Piano Concerto No 20, K466^a

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2, Op 18^b

Aldo Ciccolini *pf* **London Philharmonic**

Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin

LPO ㉔ LPO0102 (69' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,

^bMay 27, 2009; ^aOctober 12, 2011



Aldo Ciccolini can be numbered among the likes of Arthur

Rubinstein, Mieczysław Horszowski, Vlado Perlemuter and the still-very-much-active Menahem Pressler (see page 68) in terms of sheer pianistic longevity. He died three years ago at the age of 89 and these live performances of Rachmaninov and Mozart were given when he was 83 and 86 respectively.

Ciccolini's trademark finesse and clarity of fingerwork are very much in evidence. His Mozart D minor Concerto may sound a touch old-fashioned now that chamber-

musical forces and heady speeds have become the norm, but there's palpable affection to his approach. He may treat the outer movements quite steadily but his playing is never less than engaging. His passagework is lithe, trills are light and airy and his first-movement cadenza (the Beethoven one) is dispatched with confidence; what I did miss, however, was the movement's sense of angst. The slow movement is a touch romanticised in its rubato but more concerning is the lack of fire in the dramatic minor-key outburst. The LPO (and the woodwind in particular) are on terrific form, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin is a dream partner, following Ciccolini's lead with great sensitivity.

Ciccolini brings to Rachmaninov's Second Concerto a striking lucidity of textures and a rare gracefulness; there's lightness too in the *scherzando* passages in the first movement. Speeds in the outer movements are, as in the Mozart, on the steady side; but, more importantly, the surging climaxes lack an essential hot-bloodedness, leaving them sounding overly sedate. And while the melodic lines of the *Adagio sostenuto* are beautifully shaped, again the effect is relatively low-octane, emotionally speaking. **Harriet Smith**

Mozart

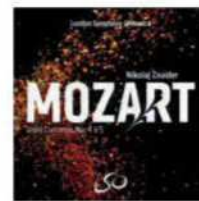
Violin Concertos – No 4, K218^a; No 5, K219^b

London Symphony Orchestra / Nikolaj Znaider *vn*

LSO Live ㉔ ㉕ LSO0807 (50' • DDD/DSD)

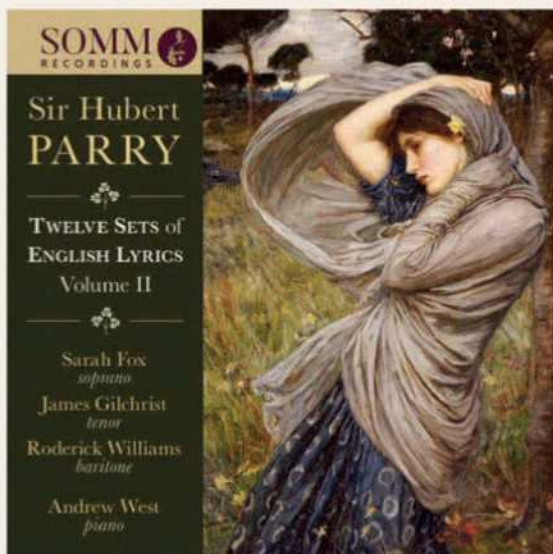
Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

^aDecember 18, 2016; ^bMay 14, 2017



My first, uncharitable, reaction was to feel short-changed that we're offered just

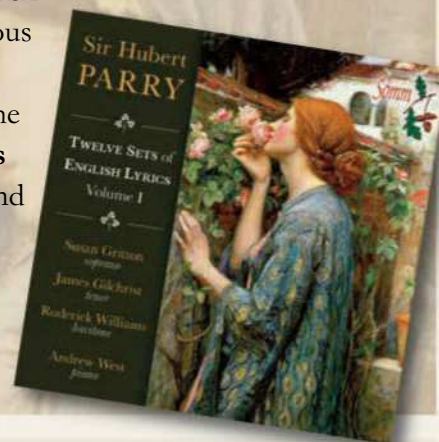
two concertos where rival discs almost invariably include three. But from his initial entry in No 4, where Mozart charmingly evokes fairy trumpets, Nikolaj Znaider delights the ear with playing that mingles his trademark finesse with an impish exuberance so crucial to these works of Mozart's teens. Everything has a specific, individual character. Znaider's passagework in the outer movements of K218 combines poise with a dancing lightness of touch. And he brings an altogether bolder brilliance to the A major Concerto, No 5, a bigger work in every sense, without overstepping the bounds of accepted Classical style. Znaider is gleefully responsive at the points when Mozart invites an improvised flourish, and provides what I take to be his own cadenzas, entertaining if a bit fussy for some tastes.



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Mark Bebbington
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Jan Latham-Koenig



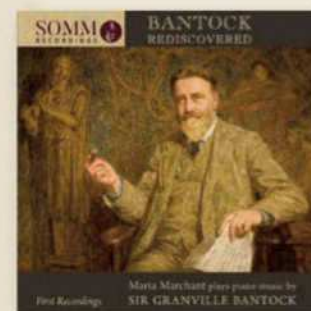
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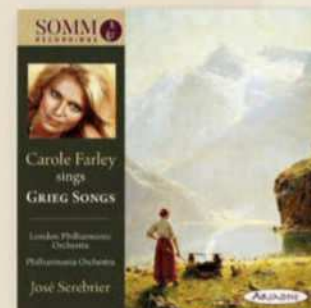


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First Recordings



CAROLE FARLEY sings
GRIEG SONGS
Orchestrated and conducted by **José Serebrier**
London Philharmonic Orchestra,
Philharmonia Orchestra

In the two Elysian slow movements Znaider spins an exquisite singing line, innocence and sensuality held in ideal balance. My first reaction to the *Adagio* of No 5 – my desert island movement among Mozart's teenage works – was that it was too slow. But Znaider vindicates his tempo choice with his hushed inwardness and the vocal eloquence of his phrasing.

Other violinists have dared more in the so-called Turkish (but really Hungarian) episode of No 5's finale, where Znaider favours elegance over gypsy wildness. And while the scaled-down LSO play alertly enough, oboes and horns can be soaked up in the *tutti*s (especially in No 5) and bass lines sound over-weighted; though, to be fair, the Barbican is never anyone's dream acoustic. Choice among recordings of these concertos is bewildering, of course. My own favourites include the zany inventive Pekka Kuusisto (Ondine, 3/04) and, on period instruments, Andrew Manze (Harmonia Mundi, 5/06) and, more recently, Isabelle Faust (Harmonia Mundi, 12/16), both of whom treat the concertos as chamber music writ large. Znaider's approach is more traditional. But while the short playing-time may niggle, his many fans can be assured that here is some of the most sheerly beautiful Mozart violin-playing in the catalogue. **Richard Wigmore**

Pärt

Lamentate³. These Words ...

³**Maki Namekawa** *pf*

Bruckner Orchestra, Linz / Dennis Russell Davies
Orange Mountain © OMM0124 (56' • DDD)



Ethereal, spiritual, transcendental ... such epithets are often applied to Arvo

Pärt but only partly reveal the composer's sound and musical style. One need look no further than *Lamentate* for piano and orchestra. Composed in 2002, the starting point for *Lamentate* was Anish Kapoor's immense sculpture *Marsyas* (the first performance took place in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, where *Marsyas* was installed in 2003). It prompted Pärt to look to the Slavic text of a Byzantine hymn, whose opening lines translate as follows: 'My time is ending and thy dread judgement seat is being made ready. My life is passing; judgement awaits me.'

While these words are never actually heard, they are presented in the work's main theme – solemnly announced at the beginning on trombones and trumpets. The music then gets caught up in a dense,

dissonant sonic vortex – very un-Pärt-like – and while the work is not all fire and brimstone (the fourth and fifth movements revisit the sound world of earlier Pärt pieces such as *Für Alina* and *Fratres*), an air of uncertainty hovers ominously over the work like a dark cloud. This reaches a climax in the seventh movement with the return of the main theme, this time punctuated by visceral rhythmic interjections in piano and percussion.

Despite such sharp contrasts and jagged juxtapositions, in comparison with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic and JoAnn Falletta, the Bruckner Orchester Linz under Dennis Russell Davies produce a more balanced performance. This is enhanced by the unobtrusive piano interpolations of Maki Namekawa, who provides subtle and nuanced extensions to the orchestral palette. The other work included here, *These Words ...* (2008) for string orchestra and percussion, is more subdued though in its own way equally unsettling. Both works perhaps demonstrate how inadequate and inappropriate a term such as 'holly minimalism' can be in describing the music of a composer whose style is far broader and more variegated than is often given credit.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Lamentate – selected comparison:

Van Raat, Netherlands Rad Chbr PO, Falletta
(12/11) (NAXO) 8 572525

Ravel

Ma Mère l'Oye. Shéhérazade – ouverture de féerie. **Le tombeau de Couperin**

Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5281 (57' • DDD)



François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles' second Ravel disc for Harmonia Mundi is

every bit as fine as their much-admired debut recording of *Daphnis et Chloé* for the label released last year (6/17). It has all the exemplary qualities we've come to expect from Roth and his orchestra: a painstaking reconstruction of period sound; interpretations of considerable cogency and subtlety that remain free from any trace of academicism; and playing of scrupulous precision and virtuosity that is never self-consciously showy.

Roth opts for the 1912 ballet version of *Ma Mère l'Oye*, an altogether trickier prospect for a conductor than the original suite, since the interludes Ravel composed to link the individual tales can seem

discursive if not carefully handled. Here, however, one is struck by a remarkable sense of homogeneity, as if the performance were recorded in a single take, when in fact it was made over four days in three different venues. The transparent textures, with every shift in colour beautifully realised and balanced, are consistently beguiling, though Roth downplays the menacing undertow some have found in the score: Beauty's Beast swaggers unthreateningly and Petit Poucet, lost in his forest, sounds less disconsolate than he sometimes does. But the magic is genuine throughout, above all in 'Laideronette', which is breathtaking in its delicacy, and the Sleeping Beauty's pavane, where time really does seem to stand still.

In *Le tombeau de Couperin*, however, Roth is wonderfully alert to the emotional ambiguities of a work that both gazes back longingly to the 18th century and commemorates Ravel's friends killed in action in the First World War. Careful balance between strings and woodwind at the start of the Forlane reminds us just how disorientating Ravel's counterpoint is at this point, while the Menuet generates a sense of deep melancholy that the Rigaudon's extrovert brilliance doesn't quite dispel. Les Siècles' oboist, Hélène Mourot, is rightly given an individual credit for the fluid beauty of her playing here, and is also heard to advantage in the early (1898) *Shéhérazade* overture, not to be confused with the later, more familiar song-cycle of the same name.

Ravel withdrew the score after the premiere, deeming it 'poorly constructed', which is untrue, though its dependence on thematic repetition and a certain sameness of mood make it fractionally too long for its own good. In a booklet note, however, Roth argues that the complexity of the scoring to some extent prefigures *Daphnis* and *La valse*, and makes his case for it in a richly detailed performance, conducted and played with tremendous élan and vigour.

Tim Ashley

Ries

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 75'

Piano Concertos – No 8, 'Gruss an den Rhein', Op 151; No 9, Op 177. Introduction and Polonaise, Op 174

Piers Lane *pf* **The Orchestra Now / Leon Botstein**
Hyperion © CDA68217 (73' • DDD)



Volume 75 of this remarkable series is graced by the presence of the pianist who

inaugurated it back in 1991. Piers Lane, who celebrated his 60th birthday earlier this year, and has made many other distinguished contributions to the series, this time alights on two concertos by Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838), pupil, amanuensis and friend of Beethoven.

The A flat Concerto, published in 1827, bears the subtitle *Gruss an den Rhein* ('Greeting to the Rhine'), celebrating Ries's return to his native land after living in London for 11 years. It last appeared in these pages in January 2006 when I welcomed a splendid recording on Naxos by Christopher Hinterhuber and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra under Uwe Grodd. The Introduction and Polonaise, Op 174, appeared the following year and the Piano Concerto No 9 in G minor in 2012, played by the same forces. If you have these three discs, is it worthwhile investing in the new Hyperion release? On balance, no.

The A flat Concerto, by far the best piece here, is a delightful work more reminiscent of Weber and Hummel than Beethoven, yet it remains obstinately less interesting than anything by these three geniuses. One reason is that, for all Ries's skill as a composer, the thematic material is simply not on the same level of inspiration – and melodic memorability is the key ingredient for the most successful of these Romantic Piano Concertos. Two excellent recordings of the work are, frankly, one more than required and there is scarcely a cigarette paper between the two we have. Having said that, Piers Lane, who brings his customary flair and lyrical refinement to the first two movements of Op 151, turns the Rondo finale into a brilliant tour de force that will delight even the sourest of atonalists.

Others may be more tempted than me to return to the *Introduction and Polonaise* and the G minor Concerto for repeated hearings. Agreeable as they are, and even when played and recorded as well as this, there are other more compelling works that have superior claims to Hyperion's attention. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Piano Concerto No 8 – selected comparison:

Hinterhuber, New Zealand SO, Grodd

(1/06) (NAXO) 8 557638

Piano Concerto No 9 – selected comparison:

Hinterhuber, New Zealand SO, Grodd

(1/13) (NAXO) 8 572742

Introduction and Polonaise – selected comparison:

Hinterhuber, New Zealand SO, Grodd (NAXO) 8 557844

Shostakovich

Symphony No 7, 'Leningrad', Op 60

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Kurt Masur

LPO © LPO0103 (71' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall,

December 13, 2003



The opening of this tremendous piece reveals so much about a performance.

Before the invasion, before the siege of Leningrad, there is buoyancy and uplift and hopefulness in the confident and forthright theme which begins and indeed ends the symphony. Happier times? Not if we are to believe Kurt Masur in this live Festival Hall performance from 2003. Perhaps he wanted to convey a darker subtext, a premonition of menace – threat – but texturally and tempo-wise the opening pages are possessed of a heaviness which goes on to pervade the entire performance.

A greyness prevails – and it's that uniformity of colour which detracts from some of the most original writing in the entire canon of Shostakovich symphonies. For sure the monstrous war machine which morphs from that innocuous, toe-tapping, ditty in the development of the first movement arrives with ferocious efficiency, layer upon layer, repeat upon repeat, the side drum rhythm multiplying to brutal effect. But by the time we drift into the aftermath and a lone bassoon surveys the devastation it's like the opening of the movement was a spoiler and we've been there before.

Perhaps it's simply that this reading lacks an innate 'Russianness'? There's more Mahler than usual in the spooky Scherzo, bass clarinet and flutter-tonguing flute adding to the creepiness – but still it's all a bit stern. The Stravinskian wind 'chorale' which opens Shostakovich's extraordinarily original *Adagio* has a flinty severity about it but again the heaviness of the delivery plays against the intensity. And by the time that chorale returns in strings at the close of the movement it has grown impossibly stodgy.

So not for me. There are moments of eloquence and imposing grandeur from the London Philharmonic but equally moments suggesting a shortage of rehearsal time. Was it ever thus. The long road to the mighty coda of the finale is controlled with military precision (though should that be my impression?) and is, as ever, gripping. Equally the defiance and pride of the coda which never fails to thrill. But I don't feel a big heart beating beneath the surface of this performance and nor do I feel its Russian soul.

Edward Seckerson

Tüür

Symphony No 8. *Illuminatio*^a.

Whistles and Whispers from Uluru^b

^bGenevieve Lacey recs ^aLawrence Power va

Tapiola Sinfonietta / Olari Elts

Online © ODE1303-2 (64' • DDD)



The booklet note compares Erkki-Sven Tüür's Symphony No 8 with the process

of 'motifs growing to symphonic proportions' at work in unspecified Sibelius. You could argue that Sibelius's symphonic motifs don't actually do that, quite; they mutate into different, more imposing shapes. In Tüür's symphony the process seems to be more cellular and Beethovenian; the cells retain their exact form, pretty much. But the impetus almost always comes from below. We hear 'moving' pedal notes in the symphony that project upwards through the orchestra, sometimes stepping up through four evenly spaced intervals prompting block-chord shifts above – a Tüür hallmark that also features in the viola concerto *Illuminatio* written two years earlier.

Listeners may respond differently but I found the symphony frustrating and occasionally dull where the concerto is consistently stimulating, interesting and beautiful. Again, perhaps there are structural reasons. In my experience Tüür reacts inventively to the inescapable opposition of concerto form and *Illuminatio* is a case in point: against that bottom-up impetus we have the solo viola manipulating the orchestra from above (or, at least, from the middle) as if the ensemble were a giant marionette. What are described in Kimmo Korhonen's essay as 'dynamic chains of events' are truly so. In the symphony, 'events' that should be of similar import simply drift into noodling; harmonies fracture outwards into vibrating canvases and, hey presto, there's nowhere for the argument to go.


Lawrence Power's strength of tone also underlines how this middle-ground solo instrument prompts the composer to counter his fondness for low, clustered sounds with dazzling, tight constellations of high trumpets, woodwinds and strings. As an Estonian counterpart to the violin concerto *Distant Light* by the Latvian Pēteris Vasks, in which light appears at a distance (clue in the name), this Estonian concerto is fascinating for its apparent journey towards a light source that eventually washes out the sound altogether. The little concerto for recorder and

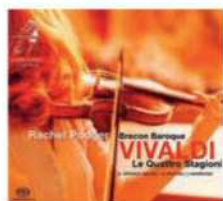
orchestra *Whistles and Whispers from Uluru* (2007) plots a course from high to low and back (via every type of recorder) and plays at combining two different but interdependent speeds – now there's a Sibelian gesture. It's excellently played by its dedicatee Genevieve Lacey, but on this rather mixed bag of a release it's *Illuminatio* you have to hear. **Andrew Mellor**

Vivaldi

The Four Seasons, Op 8 Nos 1-4. Concertos – 'L'amoroso', RV271; 'Il grosso mogul', RV208; 'Il riposo per il SS Natale', RV270

Brecon Baroque / Rachel Podger *vn*

Channel Classics ©  CCSSA40318 (75' • DDD/DSD)



It feels slightly unoriginal to begin a review by quoting that old adage,

'the best things come to those who wait'. However, those words do feel especially pertinent for Rachel Podger's Vivaldi *Four Seasons*, which she has finally put on disc in her 50th-birthday year, joined by her superlative one-to-a-part ensemble of fellow period-instrument leading lights, Brecon Baroque. It's not just that the actual

playing is superb: serene virtuoso fluency from Podger, gorgeously supported by her colleagues, with some especially fine chamber matching from violinists Johannes Pramsohler and Sabine Stoffer. It's also that this is something genuinely, effortlessly and naturally different.

At the nub of this triumph is the thought that's gone into timbre and balance across the four concertos, because I've never heard their every twist and turn served up as quite the succession of changing sound worlds as appears here. Take *Spring's* ear-catching central *Largo*: while Brecon Baroque are hardly the first ensemble to place a spotlight on that barking-dog viola, it's less usual to hear the solo violin as far back as Podger has been placed, or the viola's crescendo at the end. It's then all change again for the final *Allegro*, Jan Spencer's violone cranking up the drone effect to especially zinging levels, complemented by the subtlest of peasantry inflections from the violins.

Other notable expressive detailing include the bringing out of Daniele Caminitti's expressive theorbo-playing in *Summer's* opening movement, where also to be savoured are the wistful inflections with which Podger has coloured her tight trills. Also the way she stretches out the central *Adagio's* final top G to almost hit the

dramatic final-movement thunderstorm, itself brilliantly coloured with *sul ponticello* effects. Then there's the soft organ and theorbo continuo underpinning *Autumn's* buoyant, luminously ringing first movement. Or, perhaps most glorious of all, *Winter's* fireside *Largo*: a luxuriously tactile, tranquil feast of glowing ensemble raindrops whose beauty caught me completely off guard, topped by Podger's sensitively embellished solo line.

Podger and her team have been generous too, adding three further Vivaldi concertos, all of which have been realised with an equal ear to the scorings' possibilities for timbral flair. Even had they not done, though, this still would have been a *Four Seasons* to covet and keep. **Charlotte Gardner**

'Donauessinger Musiktage 2016'

Bedrossian Twist^a **Dillon** The Gates^b **Gander**

Cold Cadaver with Thirteen Scary Scars^c **Haas**

Trombone Concerto^d **Jaggi** Caral^e **Saunders**

Skin^f **Smolka** a yell with misprints^g


^fJuliet Fraser *sop* ^gMike Svoboda *tbn* ^aRobin Meier

elecs ^aIRCAM; ^bArditti Quartet; ^censemble

recherche; ^dSteamboat Switzerland; ^eKlangforum

Wien / Titus Engel; ^{ad}SWR Symphony Orchestra /

^{ad}Alejo Pérez, ^{be}Pierre-André Valade

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A brass extravaganza: players from the Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School combine thrillingly in Gabrieli



Fast approaching its centenary, the Donaueschinger Musiktage continues as a beacon for European music of what might still be called the avant-garde variety. Not that such a term need equate with stylistic exclusivity, as this well-filled set of world premieres confirms.

London-born and resident in Berlin, Rebecca Saunders is among the most distinctive voices of her generation, as *Skin* potently underlines. Inspired by Beckett and quoting Joyce, this 25-minute piece unfolds as a scena with antecedents in Berio and Kagel – building to a visceral climax then subsiding into a stillness both mesmeric and affecting, with Juliet Fraser fearless in a vocal part she helped to create. The other pieces on this disc are less engrossing, though Bernhard Gander draws a lively response from keyboards, guitars and percussion to the fore in *Cold Cadaver with Thirteen Scary Scars*, its morphed take on jazz-rock making space for a fatalistic citing of Beethoven during its wayward course; whereas Martin

Smolka's *a yell with misprints* elides textural stridency with ambient calm to lively if unmemorable effect.

The second disc begins with a major work from James Dillon, *The Gates*, combining string quartet and orchestra for a dialogue whose premise of 'passing through' inspires music of textural intricacy and harmonic translucency such as effortlessly sustains its half-hour span. If only Franck Bedrossian's *Twist* yielded comparable substance, but its blustery interplay of orchestra and electronics hardly evinces that radical new timbral fusion of which he speaks. Its title that of the earliest known Andean settlement, Martin Jaggi's *Caral* evokes this music from prehistory with evident resource – not least in the subtle microtonal writing for flutes; something that Georg Friedrich Haas has eschewed in the plangent modal harmonies of his Trombone Concerto, against which the soloist unfolds an elegiac and searching monologue.

The detailed and spacious SACD sound and succinctly informative booklet notes are fully in keeping with previous Neos releases from this source. Both the Dillon and Haas works were inspired by the death of Armin Köhler (1952–2014), whose near quarter-

century stewardship of the Donaueschinger Festival placed composers, musicians and listeners alike in his debt. **Richard Whitehouse**

'Gabrieli for Brass'

'Venetian Extravaganza'

Buonamente Sonate et canzonì – Sonata a 6
Frescobaldi Canzon terza a due canti **G Gabrieli**
 Canzonì et sonate – Canzon III a 6; Canzon V a 7;
 Canzon VIII a 8; Canzon XVIII a 14; Canzon XXI
 'con tre violini'; Sonata XIX a 15; Sonata XX a 22.
 Canzonì per sonare – Canzon 'La Spiritata' a 4.
 Sacrae symphoniae – Canzon duodecimi toni
 a 10 (II); Canzon noni toni a 12; Canzon septimi
 toni a 8 (II); Sonata octavi toni a 12; Sonata pian e
 forte a 8 **Gussago** Sonate a quattro, sei et otto –
 La Bottana a 4 **Lappi** Canzon undecima
 'La Serafina' a 4 **Massaino** Canzonì per sonare –
 Canzon No 33 a 8 **Viadana** Sinfonie musicali –
 Sinfonia 'La Bergamasca' a 8

Royal Academy of Music and Juilliard School
Brass / Reinhold Friedrich

Linn © CKD581 (76' • DDD)



As Royal Academy of Music Principal Jonathan Freeman-Attwood reminds us in



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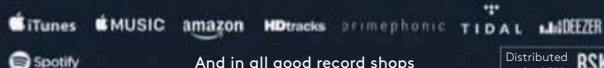
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— FINANCIAL TIMES

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

THE ART OF CONDUCTING

Peter Quantrill is a fly on the wall in orchestral rehearsals



Behind the scenes: Zubin Mehta is one of six conductors revealingly filmed in rehearsal

'In Rehearsal'

JS Bach Cantata No 63^a **Bartók** The Miraculous Mandarin, Sz73 – Suite^b **Debussy** La mer^c **Haydn** Symphony No 88^d **Prokofiev** Scythian Suite, Op 20^e **R Strauss** Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op 28^f
^aMonteverdi Choir; ^bEnglish Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner; ^cOslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Mariss Jansons; ^dLos Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen; ^ePhilharmonia Orchestra / Christoph von Dohnányi; ^fRotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev; ^gIsrael Philharmonic Orchestra / Zubin Mehta

EuroArts © 208 2334 (6h 11' • NTSC • 4.3/16:9 PCM stereo/mono • 0 • s). Recorded 1996-99



At the time of going to press all six conductors featured on this set are still with us, but reminders salutary and poignant of how long ago these documentaries were made (1996-99) press hard upon each other when Esa-Pekka Salonen uses a car phone to call his agent, before the late Ernest Fleischmann gives a piece to camera about what Salonen has brought to the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

It's the most revealing of the six films in terms of what both can and can't be learnt from the orchestral rehearsal as a commercial product for domestic consumption. Why the long faces in the band? How would you feel about

doing your job, or pretending to, with a camera up your nose or peering at your shoes? Wired in and miked up, Salonen gets on with adjusting balances in *La mer*, saying please, thank you and bravo. Back at home on the piano he brings out motivic family resemblances in Debussy's symphonic seascape with the aid of specially filmed sectionals. On the podium, every gesture seems to mirror the inner life of the piece, not in the sense of balletic simulacrum but the mysterious 'expression of the invisible', observed by the theatre director Peter Brook, that conductors themselves cannot explain.

All the while, though, it's impossible to ignore the elephant in the room. Because we are the elephant. We are the ones trampling over 'the quiet and security in which anyone may dare expose himself', demanded by Brook as the prerequisite of an adequate rehearsal space. In fact there are testaments to and (more significantly) demonstrations of trust throughout these films: when members of the Israel Philharmonic eagerly anticipate playing *Till Eulenspiegel* for the first time after lifting their self-imposed prohibition on Strauss's music; and when Zubin Mehta revealingly confesses to them that he has never before prepared the piece 'from scratch'.

But trust has to be tested to be earned, and here is the exposed space where the camera will not or at any rate does not follow. The IPO's first horn tearing a strip off his timpanist colleague for an

early entry is very much the exception. These are not films that show a conductor incapable of beating in 5/8, missing a crucial cue or losing his rag, though those things happen every morning in concert halls around the world.

A previous volume, 'In Rehearsal & Performance' (EuroArts 206 1424), compiled footage of eight conductors from an older generation. Böhm, Celibidache and Fricşay are filmed throwing shade at their men (always men) without fear of reprisal or complaints to the union; none of Brook's 'sacred space' there. Has the maestro culture changed since then? Undoubtedly so, and it would be good to see a third volume one day, made with more female conductors and in the wake of the #MeToo movement.

No discussion is made of the stick technique and body language which send the most important signals from conductor to orchestra and back again: the Concertgebouw masterclasses with Daniele Gatti and three apprentices (A/17) are essential viewing for this. Filmed at work on Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* with the Oslo Philharmonic, Mariss Jansons has the least to say either in rehearsal or to camera, but all six conductors have their verbal, non-technical ways of getting what they want – Christoph von Dohnányi's avuncular charm with the Philharmonia, Valery Gergiev's imagery the more vivid for its clumsy expression. Anyone who regards a Gergiev rehearsal film as a rarity by definition may also learn a great deal from YouTube footage of him putting the young members of the Verbier Festival Orchestra through their paces in Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*.

The odd man out is John Eliot Gardiner, working as he is here with singers – the professional Monteverdi Choir, but choral singers all the same, who interact with a conductor in very different (generally more submissive) ways. They are rehearsing for a recording at Abbey Road Studios, where time is more money; thought transfers to practice with the alacrity of a greyhound out of the traps, even as Gardiner zeroes in on 'words issuing as sounds from people's mouths, with pitch, pause, rhythm and gesture as part of their meaning'. This, for Brook, is what rehearsing's all about, though in *The Empty Space* he entirely fails to understand the relevance of his insight to musicians. **G**

the booklet for this recording, performances of Gabrieli's ensemble music have tended to fall into two distinct camps: those on the cornetts and sackbuts the composer would have known, mellow, rounded and historically informed in terms of tempo relationships and ornamentation; and those by modern brass ensembles of trumpets and trombones, bright, hard-edged and often gleefully virtuosos. The musical object of this project – alongside a diplomatic one of bringing together talented trumpeters and trombonists from two great conservatoires – was to find a way of treading the middle ground between traditions. It does so in a triumph worthy of the grandest of fanfares.

Directed by the experienced hand of Reinhold Friedrich, the ensemble (which ranges in size from four to 22) quickly settles into a style totally satisfying in itself, taking the warm and gladdening foundation of smoothly blended trombones and the incisive agility of the trumpets and, according to Gabrieli's demands, either playing them off against each other or combining them to wrap the listener up in one tingling embrace. The clean attack and technical security of the modern instruments help highlight many textural details, while Friedrich's sensitivity to pace and dynamic reveals the Gabrieli's control of harmonic and rhythmic flow in all its genius, especially in longer works such as the wondrous Sonata XVIII a 14 or the disc's climax, the mighty Sonata XX a 22.

The programme is billed as a 'Venetian Extravaganza', and indeed not all the pieces are by Gabrieli. Among the others Lodovico Viadana and Cesario Gussago are both bringers of a rather secular jollity, while a sonata by Buonamente edges us towards the Baroque. But noble Gabrieli is rightly the main man, and this one-off ensemble does him proud. **Lindsay Kemp**

'Journey to Mozart'

Gluck Orfeo ed Euridice – Dance of the Furies; Dance of the Blessed Spirits **Haydn** Violin Concerto, HobVIIa:4 **Mozart** Violin Concerto No 3, K216. Adagio, K261. Piano Sonata No 11, K331 – Alla turca (arr Fourés) **Mysliveček** Violin Concerto in D – Larghetto **Salomon** Romance **Zurich Chamber Orchestra** / **Daniel Hope** v71
DG (P) 479 8376GH (69' • DDD)



You could never accuse Daniel Hope of going for the obvious. Rather

than record yet another album of Mozart concertos, he presents the ever-popular G major Concerto, No 3, in the context of

Mozart's predecessors and contemporaries: 'a reflection of the Age as I see and hear it', as he puts it in the booklet. Some of Hope's choices may raise an eyebrow. The curmudgeon in me questioned his inclusion of Haydn's G major Concerto, whose authenticity is debated – not that this worries the note writer, who confidently ascribes it to Haydn with the date 1768. Nor was I taken by the arrangement of Gluck's Dance of the Blessed Spirits, whose remote, otherworldly flute solo becomes altogether too human and 'present' on the violin, even when played as sensitively as here. But Hope's other left-field choices – the gently melancholy *Larghetto* from a concerto by Mozart's Bohemian friend Josef Mysliveček, and Johann Peter Salomon's *Romance* – are charmers, while the souped-up *Rondo alla turca*, with harpsichord as surrogate percussion, is good, lusty fun.

Abetted by the polished Zurich Chamber Orchestra, whose accompaniments are always lithe and buoyant, Hope brings abundant character and colour to all the music here. Occasionally – I'm thinking especially of the opening *Allegro* of the Mozart concerto – his penchant for minute shadings and nuances can seem oversophisticated. But with his questing imagination and a tonal palette that ranges from the smoky to the seraphically sweet, everything sounds fresh and spontaneous. Mozart's *adagios* both sing and speak, with phrases newly imagined when they recur; and here and elsewhere he makes discreet, expressive use of portamento, crucial to an 18th-century violinist's armoury. In the Haydn, if it is indeed by him, Hope exploits the rich, throaty resonance of his G string in the first movement (where his cadenza slyly quotes the famous C major Cello Concerto), and spins a chaste *cantabile* line in the *Adagio*. It hardly needs adding that he is in his element in the Haydn and Mozart finales, dispatched with verve, delicacy and an irreverent twinkle in the eye.

Richard Wigmore

'Music of the Americas'

Bernstein Symphonic Dances from West Side Story **Gershwin** An American in Paris **Piazzolla** Tangazo **Revueltas** Sensemayá **Houston Symphony Orchestra** / **Andrés Orozco-Estrada**
Pentatone (P) PTC5186 619 (66' • DDD/DSD)



'The common denominator in all of these works is the rhythm which is

highly articulated, flexible and energised', writes Andrés Orozco-Estrada in a prefatory booklet note. It's a convincing enough explanation for why he brought these pieces together. Well, it's convincing on paper; the performances themselves aren't nearly as persuasive. And, to be blunt about it, the problem is a consistent lack of rhythmic vitality.

Let's start with *An American in Paris*. Orozco-Estrada takes a unusually laid-back view of Gershwin's score. True, the opening is marked *Allegretto grazioso*, but Orozco-Estrada's leisurely tempo is not that different from Bernstein's in his classic New York Philharmonic recording (Sony Classical, 10/60). The difference is in the details. Note, for example, how Bernstein has the violins put a little kick into the repeated semiquaver figure, and that the brass syncopations nudge the tempo forwards, all of which helps to evoke an atmosphere of chaotic charm that's peculiarly Parisian.

Astor Piazzolla's *Tangazo* starts promisingly. Although here again the initial tempo is daringly slow, Orozco-Estrada gets the Houston Symphony strings to shape their long-limbed, achingly nostalgic lines with expressive eloquence. Yet when the music shifts into a higher gear with an explosive volley of percussion (at 6'20"), the rhythms remain slack, so what should sound exhilaratingly edgy – try Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony (Argo, 6/93) – ends up more like 'easy listening'.

In Silvestre Revueltas's ostinato-driven *Sensemayá*, Orozco-Estrada and Tilson Thomas take nearly identical tempos but the New World players' biting articulation gets closer to the music's feral heart. Even Esa-Pekka Salonen and the LA Philharmonic (Sony, 4/99), moving at a much slower pace, find greater mystery and menace.

As for the *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*: Bernstein's two thrillingly incisive recordings (for Sony and DG) suggest that he meant this work to be more a condensation of the drama than a mere suite. Orozco-Estrada's interpretation is oddly muted. His 'Mambo' moves gracefully, for instance, as if it were intended for the dance floor, whereas in Bernstein's hands the effect is ominously riotous. Perhaps the recording is partly to blame here. Bernstein's Sony version is raw and raucous, yes, but aptly so. Pentatone's engineers give us a more natural concert hall perspective but (at least in the two-channel SACD version I heard) the sound lacks the necessary oomph. A disappointing release. **Andrew Farach-Colton**



Breathtaking views of Bruges (from top, clockwise): Rozenhoedkaai; the Gouden Boom procession; VéloBaroque: a musical bike tour around Bruges; the Gothic Hall in the City Hall

Musica Antiqua Bruges: the heart of Early Music

The pioneering Early Music festival will, in 2018, focus on inspiring women across the ages

Modernity has always been at the heart of the Early Music revival. The urge to discover new truths, overturn outdated orthodoxies and unlock unbridled passions in old music has been central to the movement's purpose for well over half a century. As the Early Music community's most comprehensive European meeting place and one of the world's boldest and most prestigious festivals, Musica Antiqua Bruges is committed to continuing and advancing that pioneering spirit.

In 2018, MAfestival Bruges plays its own part in redressing music's entrenched gender imbalance by presenting a wide-ranging celebration of the power and creativity of womankind. From August 3-12, the festival will roll out the red carpet to female composers from the Byzantine era to the present day. The festival will present music by women, libretti by women,

works inspired by women and works commissioned under female patronage from the 14th century to the 21st. Women have always been responsible for groundbreaking work in music and the arts. This year's MAfestival Bruges, according to the festival dramaturge Katherina Lindekens, will simply 'expand the history of music a little more'.

For nine days Bruges's soaring towers will resound to music by women from the 9th-century hymn writer Kassia to the living European composer Kaija Saariaho. From the intervening centuries, we hear music from the pens of Francesca Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, Isabella Leonarda, Jacquet de la Guerre, Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn, Edith Piaf, Ella Fitzgerald and more. The festival will also journey deep into man's fascination with inspiring, mysterious and powerful women, presenting performances of Handel's *Rinaldo*,

Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Clérambault's *Pirame et Tisbé* and Purcell's *Hail! Bright Cecilia*. The American harpsichordist Skip Sempé will take us through his own specially tailored tribute to one of the most trailblazing female musicians of all time: the harpsichordist Wanda Landowska.

Since 1964, MAFestival Bruges has served as a focal point for anyone involved in Early Music – from musicians, students and educators to instrument makers and enthusiasts.

Alongside over 25 concerts, the festival will include showcases, forums, lectures, a trade fair and a major instrumental competition, which in 2018 turns its attention to the harpsichord. There will be visits from world-renowned specialist groups including Ensemble Correspondances, Theatre of the Ayre, Ensemble Le Caravansérail, cantoLX, Il Gardellino, Le Fonte Musica and more. Ten new ensembles will participate in the Festival's week-long Fringe, which offers young Early Music groups the chance to present themselves to an international audience, in some cases for the very first time.

Bruges encapsulates the spirit of the Early Music revival – a modern city cradled inside a medieval design

Hosting all of them, and the many music professionals and audience members who will travel from different corners of the world (and other parts of Belgium) to take part, is a town that encapsulates the spirit of the Early Music revival. Bruges is a modern city cradled inside a medieval design. It is both a focal point for research and creativity, and a living museum whose every cobbled lane and photogenic square presents

its own history lessons.

MAfestival Bruges takes full advantage of its fairy-tale home city and will seep into every corner of its 14,000 hectares. Concerts take place at state-of-the-art modern

venues including the Concertgebouw Brugge but will also make use of the city's beautiful historic halls and churches too. There is even the chance to take a bicycle tour through the city's woodlands and wetlands with VéloBaroque, MAFestival Bruges' very own immersive concert experience that will take you to some surprising venues. Any trip to Bruges is special. Make yours unique with the help of a feast of Early Music – and so much more. **G**



(Top) Concertgebouw Brugge, outside and inside; (middle left) La Fonte Musica; (middle right) the Frank Vaganée Trio, Zefiro Torna and Annelies Van Gramberen

Plan your visit to Bruges now at mafestival.be

Schumann's Cello Concerto

Gabriel Schwabe talks to **Hugo Shirley** about the challenges of this most 'unconcerto-like' piece

From the way Gabriel Schwabe talks about Schumann's Cello Concerto, it's clear that this is a piece he loves deeply. But he understands why this late work, like so much late Schumann, can struggle in the popularity stakes.

Completed in 1850 but not properly premiered until 1860, it's a concerto that – as we agree on many occasions during our chat – is distinctly unconcerto-like. 'Schumann used the title *Konzertstück*,' says the cellist, who has recorded it with Lars Vogt and the Royal Northern Sinfonia for Naxos, 'which is much more true to the character of the piece.' It usually comes in just above the 20-minute mark; its exquisite middle movement barely lasts four minutes. And it's a work in which the relationship between soloist and orchestra is an intimate one, capturing the gentle push and pull of conversation rather than exchanges of grandstanding rhetoric.

Schwabe himself admits that the piece only revealed its secrets to him gradually. 'I'd known it since I was a kid, but I think I was around 18 or 19 when I first learnt it. I had some understanding of it then, but that's very much in contrast with how I see the piece today.' Part of the reason, he continues, is Schumann's tempo markings. 'They are very different from how it was usually performed then, and at that time I was maybe not so aware of what Schumann intended. Later, when I returned to it, I tried to make sense of the incredibly fast tempo markings that he writes.' For the first movement, the marking as it stands, crotchet=130, is a compromise from the original crotchet=144. By the time of the first printed edition, however, the suggested tempo had already sunk even further, to crotchet=96.

'The 130 suggestion is still incredibly fast,' Schwabe says, 'but I think it's less about tempo than it is about the character of the piece.' That character, he suggests, can be found in the first instance by remembering that original *Konzertstück* designation. 'It takes away a lot of the heavy sort of melancholic sound that we might look for and gives it a much lighter quality. I think it's much closer to, say, the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto. You really have to work together with the orchestra; it's more like a piece of chamber music than other concertos.' This, he tells me, was one of the major advantages of recording the work with a group such as the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

By this stage we've started perusing the score, but find ourselves concentrating for some time on the first page.



Chamber music in all but name: Schwabe records Schumann's Cello Concerto with the Royal Northern Sinfonia

'The beginning has this breathless quality,' Schwabe observes. 'And those opening chords – such an unusual beginning for a concerto.' I suggest that right from the start there's little sense of it being a virtuosic work. 'Yes, which is one of the main reasons early on that it was not successful. But it rewards you in very different ways.' I turn forward a few pages, but

'You really have to work together with the orchestra; it's more like a piece of chamber music than other concertos'

Schwabe hasn't quite finished. He turns us back: 'And here's an interesting chord, in bar 11,' he points to the chord on the third beat, made up of F, an off-beat B, D sharp and G sharp. 'It's actually a "*Tristan* chord", which resolves onto the dominant here. It's a moment I always enjoy when I play it.' And as we do start to make our way through the score, it's clear it's full of moments he relishes. We get to the triplet passages starting at bar 68, which someone in my library score

has marked 'Spielperiode' (literally, 'play period'), a term of which he approves: 'Oh, I like that!'

The whole movement is in a state of 'constant change', Schwabe says, noting that musical ideas begin to be transformed almost as soon as they first appear. 'We don't have those long phrases, that sense of grand architecture. There's a big arch, in a way, but there's a sense of tension between what the cello and orchestra are trying to do.' One remarkable passage, I suggest, is the cello's phrase at bar 130, digging insistently around low C, B flat and A. 'Yes, it's weird,' he affirms. 'After this whole sort of lyrical passage, you have this roughness. Schumann actually writes *marcato*, but he could also have written *ruvido* – meaning rough or coarse. And it's also interesting when you look at the different articulations he uses for the same motif.'

'These triplets with the pauses in between create something of a breathless quality, while the cello is so lyrical and singing'

We rattle through to the end of the first movement and get to the remarkable passage that takes us into that modest slow movement. 'It's amazing, this transition, so harmonically interesting; and again, we have the one big *tutti*, full of energy going forwards, which immediately gets cut off.' In the slow movement he points once again to the apparent difference in character between the cello and the orchestra's accompaniment: 'Look at these triplets with the pauses in between, which create something of a breathless quality, while the cello is so lyrical and singing.' We turn further into the piece. 'Also, this is such an amazing moment,' he jumps in, showing me the remarkable double-stopped passage 18 bars in. 'It's like a religious moment in a sense, like a prayer.' It was a section in the score, he tells me, that he worked on quite a bit in the recording sessions.

Alas, it's all over too quickly, as Schumann changes the mood and the tempo in preparation for going into the finale: 'First it's *etwas lebhafter*,' Schwabe notes, 'then *Tempo primo* – which must refer to the tempo of the second movement – and then *schneller*, then *schneller und schneller*.' When we get to the *Sehr lebhaft* of the final movement proper, Schwabe immediately points out the A–F–E that tops the orchestra's three opening chords, and its obvious relation to the *Frei aber einsam* motif that also makes an appearance in several of the other works he's including as a coupling on the new album.

It's this final movement, he says, that best fits Schumann's description of the work, in a letter to his publisher, as 'jolly'. But here in the finale the technical challenges are also considerable. 'Although almost anything that is virtuosic here is almost always light, with the exception of those passages leading into the big *tuttis*.' Again, though, the relationship between soloist and orchestra is especially close – Schwabe points to the dovetailing phrases that occur from around bar 480. 'You need to be partners in crime; it needs to be seamless,' he says. As the movement progresses, the cello part becomes increasingly virtuosic, but this relationship clearly remains key right up until the end, which, as Schumann revised it – 'one of those occasions where you can see why', Schwabe says – brings the work to an exciting conclusion, as the cello rises up in a flourish of triplets. 6

The Schumann disc is out on May 11; it will be reviewed next issue

PREMIERE RECORDINGS —OLD & NEW ON— DELPHIAN



DCD34208 (CD)
DCD34303 (blu-ray)

Hieronymus Praetorius:
Missa Tulerunt Dominum meum
Siglo de Oro / Patrick Allies

Though less well known than his namesake Michael, as organist at Hamburg's Jacobikirche Hieronymus Praetorius was one of the city's most important cultural figures. So it is remarkable that his magnificent mass for Holy Week, the *Missa Tulerunt Dominum meum*, has until now remained unrecorded. Some four hundred years after it was first performed, Siglo de Oro present it as it might have been heard in seventeenth-century Hamburg, weaving in motets from some of Praetorius's most gifted contemporaries. Bavarian Hans Leo Hassler, Netherlandish Orlando de Lassus, Venetian Andrea Gabrieli, and the itinerant Jacob Handl – each lends a motet to complement the unfolding liturgical journey, from the quiet solemnity of Maundy Thursday through to the exultant joy of Easter Day.

'accomplished performances – confident, sonorous and full of character' — Gramophone, April 2018



DCD34201

After the Tryst:
new music for saxophone and piano
McKenzie Sawers Duo

Sue McKenzie and Ingrid Sawers, leading advocates of the rapidly growing repertoire for soprano saxophone and piano, make their second Delphian outing with a survey of some of its recent British highlights. James MacMillan's poignant lyricism gives way to contained ecstasy, then increasingly unfettered vitality, in a pair of seminal works by Michael Nyman. In evocative miniature dramas by Sally Beamish and Judith Weir the instrument gives voice respectively to the half-human, half-spirit nature of Shakespeare's Caliban and to the life and death by hanging of a condemned Scottish bagpiper.

'The liquid tone of Sue McKenzie is the perfect vehicle for this engaging collection' — Apple Music, March 2018



DCD34199

Lyell Cresswell: Music for string quartet
Red Note Ensemble

A compelling survey of string chamber music by Lyell Cresswell, whose unique body of work has been a vital presence in his adopted home of Scotland for four decades now while retaining qualities of light, space and openness that evoke his native New Zealand. The imposing String Quartet plays host to a wealth of detail which enriches but never obscures the 'long, strong tune' that threads through the work. *Capricci* is a set of vividly individual dances, *Ricerari* a sequence of variations inspired by Cresswell's favourite living painter. Instrumental virtuosity comes to the fore in *Kotetete*, whose title puns on 'quartet' and on the Maori word for 'chattering'.

'The virtuosity of Red Note's playing makes for a warm recommendation' — Gramophone, April 2018

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Chamber



Liam Cagney gets acquainted with the surreal music of Philip Venables: *'Illusions, for speaker and ensemble, is an unboly screed of lounge muzak and glitch on a cruise ship sailing the Styx'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



Charlotte Gardner enjoys a disc of Neapolitan concertos: *'The instruments on these beautifully shaped, gently buoyant readings are a lovely-sounding bunch'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**

Abrahamsen

String Quartets – No 1, '10 Preludes';

No 2; No 3; No 4

Arditti Quartet

Winter & Winter Ⓢ 910 242-2 (68' • DDD)



This backwards-looking survey of Hans Abrahamsen's four string quartets,

starting with the most recent from 2012 and finishing with the 10 Preludes of 1973, fills a major gap in this elusive composer's discography. The quartet is one of the few genres Abrahamsen has cultivated more than once, with the First recast for alternative instrumentations: string orchestra and, just last year, cello quartet.

Abrahamsen's trademark pared-down textures and glacial-moving developments are immediately apparent in the opening 'Light and airy' movement of the Fourth Quartet, a static essay in pure harmonics. Each movement injects additional ingredients, tied together exhilaratingly in the 'Gently rocking' finale. Nominally in four movements, the brief Third (2008) – all 11 and a half minutes of it – is really a diptych with two brief introductions. The more substantial Second (1981), arguably his first for the medium proper, is an example of the strain of expressionism that runs as an undercurrent through his oeuvre.

The Arditti Quartet's performances are clinical and virtuoso, revelling in the music's exploratory qualities. It is instructive – and fascinating – to compare their version of No 1 with last year's *Gramophone* Award-nominated recording from the Danish Quartet (coupled with early quartets by Nørgård and Adès). The Danish found more of the music behind the technical challenges (rendered immaculately) in an interpretation that is more satisfying expressively and warmer in tone. Both performances last for around 21 minutes but how they traverse that time is in places very different, especially in

Prelude No 5, which under the Arditti's bows is half as long again as from the Danish Quartet. That said, there is much to admire in the Arditti's cooler playing; their all-Abrahamsen programme is more attractive and, at 69' as opposed to ECM's paltry 47', rather better value for money. Fine sound. **Guy Rickards**

String Quartet No 1 – comparative version:

Danish Qt (6/16) (ECM) 481 2385

JS Bach

'Speculation on JS Bach – Reconstructed Chamber Music & Chorals'

JS Bach *An Wasserflüssen Babylon*, BWV653.

Concerto a 4, BWV548/885. *Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr*

Jesu Christ, BWV639. *Kommst du nun, Jesu,*

vom Himmel herunter, BWV650. *O Mensch,*

bewein' dein Sünde gross, BWV622. *Trio*

Sonatas – after BWV1028; after BWV1032;

BWVAnh111/655/584/676. *Wenn wir in höchsten*

Nöthen sein, BWV641. **Börner** *Jesu meine*

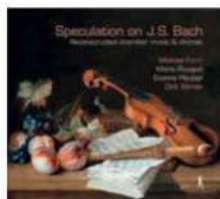
Freude, after BWV794. *Wer nur den lieben Gott*

lässt walten, after BWV797

Michael Form *rec Marie Rouquié* *vn*

Étienne Floutier *bass viol* **Dirk Börner** *hpd*

Pan Classics Ⓢ PC10384 (71' • DDD)



The chorale melody was the cantus firmus of Bach's art, its

generative, motivating force, its divine metaphor. It serves a similar function in these provocative musical 'speculations' – the spectres of trio sonatas and chorale arrangements which might have been.

'Johann Sebastian Bach's chamber music was in constant transition', writes recorder player Michael Form in his booklet note, before speculating on the possible chamber works implied not just in Bach's extant music but in his practice as a musician. He also introduces the chorale arrangements as interludes which, in their varied instrumentations, imitate organ stops while presenting them in 'a new light, in an unfamiliar sonority ... intimate alternatives to the romantic

overstimulation of Leopold Stokowski's orchestral transcriptions'.

The combination of recorder, violin, gamba and harpsichord gives the three trio sonatas and final, resonant 'Concerto a 4' a lightness and transparency well suited to the predominantly dancelike movements, whether nonchalant, as in the *Affettuoso* of the D major Trio Sonata after BWV1032, which is an extraordinary arrangement of the F minor Prelude from Book 2 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, or stately, as in the *Largo* of the B major Trio Sonata, or fast and buoyant, as in the final *Allegro* of the same Trio.

But it is the exquisite chorale arrangements, both 'straight' and in harpsichordist Dirk Börner's clever compositions combining three-part inventions with chorale melodies, that steal the show here. They are just so compellingly realised, not least in performances which, even when the recorder is absent, as in the gorgeous *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein* for violin and gamba, seem to take their cue from its delicate breath-born(e) tones. **William Yeoman**

Beethoven

'Music for Winds'

Duo, WoO27 No 1. **March**, WoO29. **Octet**,

Op 103. **Rondino**, WoO25. **Sextet**, Op 71

Scottish Chamber Orchestra Wind Soloists

Linn Ⓢ CKD572 (55' • DDD)



The playing of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's wind section was a highlight

of Robin Ticciati's recent recording of the Brahms symphonies (4/18), so I was delighted to receive this disc for review, even if Beethoven himself felt that none of these works belonged in his top drawer. Never mind the opus numbers; everything here comes from the composer's early years. Beethoven sheepishly told his publisher that he'd scribbled the Sextet in a single night – an unlikely story. Still,



Exuberance and delicacy: the Scottish Chamber Orchestra Wind Soloists focus on early Beethoven

it's a lively and light-hearted piece of Harmoniemusik, and the SCO wind band play it crisply, finding a happy balance between bucolic vigour and expressive delicacy. I wish the *Adagio* had a bit more breadth – it moves more like an *Andante* – but otherwise I find the musicians' exuberance irresistible. Listen to the way they swagger and swing through the Minuet, for instance.

The Duo (the first of three) was published in Paris in the first decades of the 19th century and scholars have come to doubt its authenticity. In any case, it's the kind of work that's probably more fun to play than to listen to, and while clarinetist Maximiliano Martín and bassoonist Peter Whelan appear to be enjoying themselves, their attempt to keep the music light on its feet can come off sounding clipped. I prefer Charles Neidich and Dennis Godburn's mellifluous account (Sony, 8/94), part of an identical programme with the period instrument ensemble Mozziatiato.

Mozziatiato are more leisurely and lyrical than the SCO in the proto-Schubertian *Rondino*, but the latter make the most of the work's exquisite chiaroscuro harmonies. The Sextet, too, is marvellously done here – fluent, articulate and sensitively shaped, with delicious interleaving of

phrases in the rambunctious finale. And I like the way Linn's engineers have the March begin at an aural distance, with the musicians gradually approaching, although I think this would have been more effective if placed at the programme's start instead of at its end. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Beethoven

String Quartets, Op 18 – No 1; No 2; No 3

Eybler Quartet

Coro Connections © COR16164 (70' • DDD)



It's easy to forget that when Beethoven's Op 18 quartets appeared in 1801

Haydn had yet to publish his own final quartet. The Eybler Quartet certainly haven't made that mistake: as specialists in 18th-century repertoire, they make no bones about treating Beethoven as a radical. A thoughtful booklet note by their viola player Patrick Jordan explains how they've used various different Urtext editions, as well as deciding – more contentiously – to adhere closely to the metronome marks that Beethoven appended some decades later.

First impressions are certainly startling, and not just for the headlong velocity at which the Eyblers attack the first movement of Op 18 No 1 – a speed that occasionally leaves passagework sounding scrambled, not to say (in the finale of Op 18 No 2) hectic. The acoustic (fittingly enough for such uncompromising interpretations, it's the Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto) is close and dry, which will not be to all tastes. Personally, I'd rather have drawing-room intimacy than a cathedral-like resonance in this music, and it's perfectly transparent and often thrillingly physical: loud passages have the explosive bite of a *tutti* in a Haydn symphony.

And once you've acclimatised, the revelations flood in: the swiftness with which the Eyblers take the great *Adagio* of Op 18 No 1 allows violinist Aisslinn Nosky's almost vibrato-free period-instrument tone to sound breathtakingly fragile. The playing throughout is defiantly un-glossy but consistently stylish: the helter-skelter finale of Op 18 No 3 rustles and glints like Mendelssohn's fairy music, and elsewhere there's an invigorating kick to Beethoven's rhythmic games. The Trio of Op 18 No 1's Scherzo is just straight-up hilarious. This set might infuriate you or it

might delight you: either way, I suspect, Beethoven would have been more than happy. **Richard Bratby**

Debussy · Dutilleux · Ravel

Debussy String Quartet, Op 10 Dutilleux String Quartet, 'Ainsi la nuit' Ravel String Quartet Hermès Quartet

La Dolce Volta © LDV33 (71' • DDD)



Since the advent of CD, Dutilleux's *Ainsi la nuit* has become a regular

companion piece to the long-familiar pairing of the Ravel and Debussy Quartets, with the New York Quartet leading the way in 1991 and a number of ensembles, most notably, perhaps, the Arcanto Quartet, following suit over time. The three works have been central to the Hermès Quartet's repertoire since their formation 10 years ago, though they have been hesitant about committing them to disc until now for fear, as they put it in an interview that forms the booklet notes, of 'fixing' their interpretations too early in their careers.

Their performances are indeed in many ways attractive. Aided by a pristine recording made in a theatre in Modena, they play with great elegance and clarity of tone, finely shaded dynamics and an admirable even-handedness of ensemble, qualities that serve them particularly well in the Ravel, where everything is poised and graceful, without losing sight of the work's deeper resonances. There's a beguiling lilt to the way they launch the second movement, and a deeply felt nostalgia underpins the fastidious poise of the third. Their Debussy is altogether darker in mood, with a striking muscularity at the outset and a real throb of sensuality when they reach the *Andantino* later on.

When they turn to *Ainsi la nuit*, however, their emphasis on clarity sometimes robs the work of its poetry. Dutilleux acknowledged the influence of Proustian theories of memory on the score, and Hermès Quartet are indisputably strong on its inner logic, as thematic fragments cohere, dissolve and reform themselves into melodic paragraphs across its seven movements. It's impressive, but a bit too detached for my taste: the Arcanto Quartet's sensitivity of expression is more persuasive here, together with the numinous quality they bring to the work as a whole. The Hermès's disc is well worth hearing, for the Ravel above all. But the Arcanto Quartet's Ravel and Debussy

are also beautifully focused and quite outstandingly played, and their disc is to be preferred if you want all three works together. **Tim Ashley**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Arcanto Qt (11/10) (HARM) HMC90 2067

Eötvös

The Sirens Cycle^a. Korrespondenz

^aAudrey Luna sop Calder Quartet

Budapest Music Centre © BMCCD249 (52' • DDD)



James Joyce is to contemporary music what Shakespeare was to the

Romantics. In the case of the Sirens episode from *Ulysses*, the Joycean lure is nearly as perilous as the sirens'. Given the text's exquisite musicality, how might a composer approach it and survive?

Peter Eötvös's *The Sirens Cycle* (2015-16) is the Hungarian's second string quartet, and like Schoenberg's Second String Quartet it has an additional soprano part. Eötvös sets text not only from Joyce's *Ulysses* but from Homer's *Odyssey* (in Ancient Greek) and Kafka's *The Silence of the Sirens* (in German). To generate his basic pitch material he conducted spectrographic analysis at IRCAM of audio recordings of these texts. There is no doubting Eötvös's control over the string idiom. In phrasing and timbre, the quartet parts have a bracing vocal quality (albeit far from Joyce's beloved *bel canto*). The soprano part is coloratura, lively, hectoring. There are some wonderful sonorities; the eighth movement, for example, simulates a vessel rocking at sea. But once the initial stylistic interest fades, the overall shape and focus are hard to discern. As with much avant-garde European music, being overloaded with textual references doesn't help; and, as I suggested, Joyce's text is so rich on its own that it's difficult for the music to live up to it or to interpret it in an effective way (a problem in common with Rebecca Saunders's disappointing recent Joyce-setting *Yes*).

Much shorter than *The Sirens Cycle* is Eötvös's first string quartet, *Korrespondenz* (1992). Lasting less than a quarter of an hour, *Korrespondenz* is a musical dramatisation of some of the events that befell Mozart in 1778 as gleaned from the composer's correspondence with his father. The declamatory quartet parts are wonderfully intense. Sparse texture heightens the tension, and the length is appropriate for the material. Crisp

recording and the Calder Quartet's precision playing make it an involving listen. **Liam Cagney**

A Forqueray · J-B Forqueray

'Les tourments de l'âme'

Complete Works

Michèle Déverité hpd

Kaori Uemura, Ricardo Rodríguez vas da gamba

Ryo Terakado vn Robert Kohnen hpd

Harmonia Mundi © 5 HMM90 5286/9

(4h 4' • DDD)



'Exceptional in almost every way' best describes this beautifully produced

box-set devoted to the lives and legacy of the Forquerays, father and son. First and foremost, it documents the personal journey of the French harpsichordist Michèle Déverité, who, in the absence of named sponsors, seems to have pursued it much at her own expense, though in the course of her three-year project she enlisted the advice, expertise, collaboration and even the loan of instruments from her colleagues in the Ensemble Fitzwilliam and distinguished experts in the field of French music, including her mentor Robert Kohnen, Wieland Kuijken and the distinguished musicologist Florence Gétreau.

Two and a half discs present the music Jean-Baptiste Forqueray published in 1747 in two versions – one for bass viol with accompaniment, the other an arrangement (quite possibly made with the assistance of his wife, the harpsichordist Marie-Rose) – immaculately performed mainly by Déverité alone. For reasons best known to her, a sprinkling of pieces in each of the five suites are performed in the viol version by Kaori Uemura, accompanied by Déverité and Ricardo Rodríguez. Most recently, Ketil Haugsand recorded the complete harpsichord version (Simax, 11/11) and Atsushi Sakai the viol version (Aparté, 5/16).

The rest of the third disc presents an entirely appropriate modern transcription for two harpsichords of three manuscript dances for three bass viols by 'Monsieur Forcroy' in which Déverité is joined by Kohnen, and four solo viol dances for which Déverité provides sympathetic accompaniments. Jérôme Hantaï, who edited the former, recorded the trios with Uemura, Alix Verzier and Pierre Hantaï in 2005 (Virgin/Erato Veritas) and more recently Justin Taylor recorded his own arrangement for solo harpsichord

(Alpha, 11/16); Vittorio Ghielmi edited the latter and recorded them in 2014 (Passacaille).

The music of the Forquerays presents the listener with a particular challenge: unlike the rest of the French harpsichord repertoire it is all left-of-centre, and for practical reasons owing to its origins as music for bass viol ignores the treble register, even in the 1747 harpsichord transcription, which does, indeed, depart from the viol version in numerous other ways. So, in spite of Déverité's heartfelt performances, the logic and potential of this music is best realised in the viol versions elegantly interpreted by Uemura.

The fourth disc is a treasure trove of solo and chamber music dedicated to the Forquerays, much of which has been included on other discs but never before gathered together and augmented by two compelling, recently composed tributes. It provides fresh food for thought about how the Forquerays were perceived by their colleagues.

The fifth, groundbreaking 'CD Bonus' takes this one step further, by enlisting the services of the Comédie-Française actor Nicolas Lormeau to bring to life a series of documents (the good, bad and ugly) relating to the lives of the Forquerays, most of them well enough known, but

one in particular – the final track, an excerpt from a 1703 divertissement performed at Châtenay in which Antoine Forqueray apparently took part – should captivate even the most well-informed Forquerian. The booklet contains still more revelations, notably the cautious discussion of a possibly unique portrait attributed to the painter François Delyen of Antoine Forqueray. With this wide-ranging release, Déverité has set a new, extraordinarily generous precedent, for which many thanks. **Julie Anne Sadie**

Glass

Music with Changing Parts

Salt Lake Electric Ensemble

Orange Mountain Ⓢ OMM0125 (46' • DDD)



Lying between Glass's early, strict minimalist pieces of the late 1960s (*Music in Fifths* and *Music in Similar Motion*) and large-scale compositions of the mid-1970s, such as *Music in Twelve Parts*, *Music With Changing Parts* is sometimes viewed as a work in transition. Glass himself was ambivalent, describing it as 'a little too spacey for my tastes'.

This excellent new recording by the Salt Lake Electric Ensemble will surely convince him otherwise. (And it's significant that the release is on the composer's own label.) Despite the title's reference to changes and contrasts, previous recordings (including Glass's own ensemble's 1971 release, reissued later on Nonesuch) have tended to emphasise uniformity of sound and the need to work smooth transitions between sections, ostensibly to foreground Glass's use of techniques such as additive rhythm.

In contrast, the notes and rhythms themselves serve only as a starting point for Salt Lake Electric Ensemble's imaginative recreation of Glass's score. Here, the emphasis shifts away from the logic that underpins Glass's musical processes to a focus on sound itself. The performance starts off with a nod towards the electric keyboards-plus-winds-and-voice combination of the original recording but soon takes the listener on a journey that encompasses pulsing ambient and electronic sounds, space rock and synth pop.

Combining cutting-edge sound design with old-school analogue technology, ever-changing colours and textures are shaped and sculpted in a vibrant and nuanced performance that effectively balances



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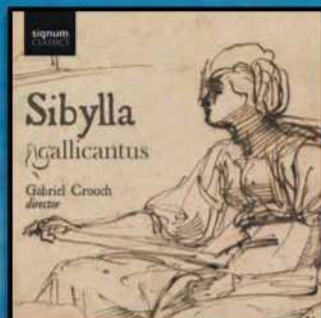
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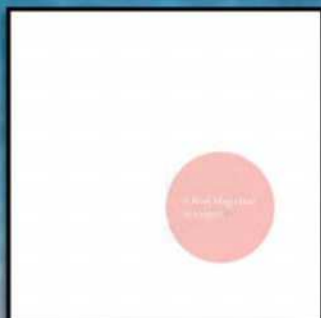
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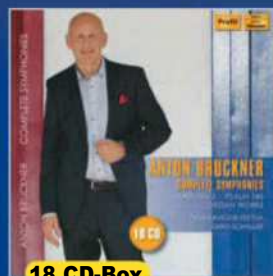
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The Colin Currie Group show their pedigree in Steve Reich's unfathomably difficult *Drumming* – see review on page 59

moments of musical flow with more sudden timbral contrasts. The use of sustained sounds introduced by Glass for the first time – the weakest link on the original recording – now serves to bind each changing part. The result is a pulsing sonic patchwork that will surely encourage many to reassess the evident merits of this early minimalist classic: *Music With Changing Parts* is really where the Philip Glass story starts. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Selected comparison:

Glass Ens (NONE) 7559 79325-2

Glière • Rachmaninov

'Eastern Wind'

Glière *Album Leaves, Op 51. Ballade, Op 4*

Rachmaninov *Cello Sonata, Op 19*

Maja Bogdanovic *vc* **Maria Belousova** *pf*

Orchid © ORC100078 (71' • DDD)



Up until now, when I've thought about Reinhold Glière, I've tended to think big and bold: the Russian Sailors' Dance from *The Red Poppy*, say, or the sprawling Technicolor heroics of the *Ilya Muromets* Symphony. One interesting feature of this

disc is an introduction from the composer's great grandson, which relates how he was sentenced to be shot 15 times during the Civil War in Ukraine.

It wouldn't be entirely fair to say that's actually the most exciting thing here, but I do wonder if pairing Glière's 12 *Album Leaves* of 1910 with Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata really makes the best case for his chamber music. The name suggests salon music, and in these sincere but samey performances, that's exactly the world that many of these miniatures evoke. Not all: there are flashes of real fantasy. No 3 opens with spread piano chords, the pianist as harp-playing bard, while No 6 is a *danse orientale* in the manner of Tchaikovsky or Glazunov, with the piano playing a languishing melody over the cello's rhythmic accompaniment. No 10, a lilting *valse triste*, would make an atmospheric (if sombre) encore.

Bogdanovic and Belousova are capable players and Bogdanovic, in particular, makes an attractive sound in all registers, with a mellow chestnut tone. But there's just not enough dynamic range, colour or – to speak plainly – character in these interpretations to make this music spring off the page; either the *Album Leaves* or the more extended *Ballade*. Nor does the

Rachmaninov ever quite take flight, or hold its own against a recent spate of excellent recordings (I'd pick Matt Haimowitz). It just makes Glière's very real qualities look a lot more modest than they are. **Richard Bratby**

Rachmaninov – selected comparison:

Haimowitz, O'Riley (12/17) (PENT) PTC5186 608

J Jenkins

Complete Four-Part Consort Music

Fretwork

Signum © 2 SIGCD528 (83' • DDD)



It may seem unfortunate for a two-CD set to total only 83 minutes, but then

this is John Jenkins's 'complete four-part consort music', so that's how it has to be. Thankfully it sells for the price of a single disc, which was presumably the original plan. Seventeen fantasias and two pavans then, just a small segment of over 800 instrumental works by a figure who was respected and liked as a composer and man by his contemporaries, and is loved by viol players today as a provider of expertly written and grateful ensemble material for them to play. And while to the lay-listener

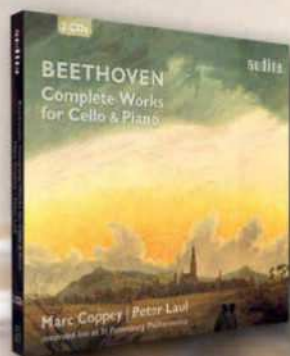
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his smoothly mellifluous music will probably never seem daring next to that of his excitable contemporary William Lawes, the extended encounter these discs provide leaves no doubt that Jenkins was a true master of the viol consort.

For this is more than just a composer who never put a foot wrong. Here is a figure who, with deftly perfect counterpoint, assured harmony and modulation and confident handling of rhythmic flow, can lead you through a succession of moods with such quiet skill that sometimes you don't notice when or how they changed. Indeed, his most striking expressive habits are the awing one of temporarily distilling the music almost to nothing (as in the central portions of *Fantasias* Nos 7 and 16) and the immensely comforting one of setting you down tenderly at the end of a piece (as in Nos 6 and 10). This is music of gentle progress, firmly on the side of the angels.

Fretwork can be expected to present him in a shining light, and they do. In an acoustic that is intimate but never starved of air, they render the part-writing with vivid clarity, each line sweetly singing, while functioning as a superbly balanced unit that can dance to the folk-like liveliness of *Fantasias* Nos 6 and 14 as readily as they can find the sonorous depths in No 9 or the pavans. More than just the 'record of record' it at first appears, this is a fine and worthy release.

Lindsay Kemp

Reich

Drumming

Synergy Vocals; Colin Currie Group

Colin Currie Records (C) CCR001 (55' • DDD)



The Colin Currie Group was formed in 2006 for a Prom that included Steve Reich's

Drumming. If you attended the concert you might well remember what an effect this expansive yet focused piece had in the Royal Albert Hall, a space possessed of precisely the same qualities.

Drumming, completed in 1971, is Reich's longest piece. It represents the culmination of his experiments with phasing and a broadening of his timbral horizons. It is rhythmically and harmonically static, yet epic in both its proportions and its journey. Though it is often cited as the first minimalist masterpiece, it probably signalled the start of the genre's fattening-up into something more maximal and less severe.

Since 2006 the Group has performed *Drumming* elsewhere with Synergy Vocals and given the first performance of the piece Reich attended as an ordinary punter. These guys have a pedigree with this unfathomably difficult score and their fresh, slick recording shows it. Handling of the overlapping of Reich's 12-beat pattern – polyrhythmic as each of the nine percussionists, two vocalists, piccolo player and whistler shimmy on to their own individual down-beat – is rock solid. On top, the playing is more than secure: confident, bright and delivered on the front foot, in apparent contrast to the ritualistic sobriety with which Reich and his musicians would play the piece in its infancy. The performance is tighter than that from Ictus, the current *Gramophone* recommendation. It is also more rooted, as neat and magnificent as a Rothko in its sewing-up of the bigger picture.

A Drumming for this decade – and probably a few to come, too. **Andrew Mellor**

Selected comparison:

Ictus (6/03) (CYPR) CYP5608

Ruehr

String Quartets – No 1, 'Four Pieces for String Quartet'^a; No 2, 'Song of the Silkie'^b; No 3^a; No 4^a; No 5, 'Bel canto'^a; No 6^a

^bStephen Salters ^{bar}Borromeo Quartet;

^aCypress Quartet

Avie (M) (2) AV2379 (140' • DDD)



Avie's third release of music by Elena Ruehr (*b*1963) follows two well-received

predecessors (11/12; 2/15) and other issues on Albany, Centaur and BMOP/sound (5/15). A common feature running through her music is 'connecting the past with the present' – outwardly different musics from different periods, whether Pérotin or Hildegard of Bingen, Indonesian dance or jazz. These sources are evoked rather than quoted, the resulting material developed in her own personal way; the connecting thread is usually rhythmic rather than harmonic or melodic. Her six quartets (written between 1991 and 2012: she is due another about now) are typical of her, deploying a musical language that, while freely tonal and unafraid of dissonance, contains little to alienate listeners nervous of the new.

The structure of each quartet is unique to itself, having little in common with the conventional form, even when nominally in the four movements of classical design, as with Nos 1, 3, 4 and 6. The *Four Pieces*

for String Quartet (1991), which became her first numbered quartet, and the Third (2001) are suites in layout, reflected in movement titles such as 'Let's Sit Beneath the Stars' and the bracing 'Estampie' (No 1), and No 3's 'Clay Flute' and 'How She Danced' (this last a vivacious scherzo). No 5 – with which disc 1 opens – is subtitled *Bel canto* but is, against expectation, a sequence of nine kaleidoscopically varied miniature movements varying between 50 seconds and three minutes in length, followed by a 10-minute finale, the beautifully lyrical 'In the garden'.

There is a tangible community of spirit in these six works, too, even with the more notionally abstract Fourth (2005) and Sixth (2012 – to my ears the most compelling and integrated of them); perhaps not as interrelated as the three quartets by Fred Lerdahl (2/12), but closer to Robert Erickson's (12/14). The striking Second Quartet, a quarter-hour single-span cantata with baritone, is utterly unlike the others in design yet sits comfortably within Ruehr's compositional universe. Stephen Salters, something of a Ruehr specialist, is in fine – occasionally falsetto – voice, nimbly accompanied by the Borromeo Quartet. The Cypress Quartet, for whom Nos 4–6 were written, play the remainder with authority and complete assurance. Avie's sound – mastered by Mark Wilsher – is beautifully clear. **Guy Rickards**

Schumann

String Quartets, Op 41 – No 2; No 3

Elias Quartet

Alpha (F) ALPHA280 (58' • DDD)

Recorded live at Potton Hall, Suffolk, May 2016



In 2010 the Elias Quartet played the first of Schumann's three string quartets

at Wigmore Hall – a richly characterised, open-hearted reading that was recorded and released on that venue's in-house label. Now, at last, the Elias complete the cycle with concert recordings from Potton Hall in Suffolk. If you were as impressed by the Wigmore performance as I was, rest assured that these new accounts do not disappoint, for I find them even more absorbingly detailed and emotionally generous.

Schumann composed these quartets as a birthday gift for Clara, writing at white heat so that the three works were completed in just seven weeks. The Doric Quartet (Chandos, 12/11) capture this sense of urgency, though with a magical,

quicksilver touch. The Elias, on the other hand, take their time. It's not that their performances are so much leisurely as they are elastic. The music breathes in their hands; and even when they stretch a phrase as if to feel its emotional weight, it still sounds natural and right. And it's not that they only pull; they push, too. In the opening movement of the F major Quartet, for instance, listen to how they make the exposition repeat feel more eager and excitable. Then savour the exquisite rubato at 4'08" in the *Andante quasi variazioni*, with its foreshadowing of a Mahlerian Ländler. Some may be irritated by the way the Elias ease gradually into the main tempo of the finale; I'm charmed by it, particularly as it's played differently each time this tune returns.

The A major Quartet is, to my ears, the jewel of the set, and the Elias play it with profound tenderness. How rapturously they play the first movement's slow introduction, for example; even the rests are made to sound as expressively necessary as the notes themselves. And in the second theme of the *Allegro* proper, where the cello sings to a palpitating accompaniment (at 1'36"), there's a vulnerability so touching I could imagine Schumann's heart asking 'is this love too good to be true?' Unlike the Stradivari Quartet (RCA, 4/18), the Elias are meticulous in observing dynamic markings, and their *pianissimo* playing can produce shivers of pleasure. Indeed, they find eloquence in the smallest detail, like the second violin's strumming grace notes at 3'34" in the *Adagio*.

I could go on enumerating the myriad glories of these performances, but you get the idea. I continue to be delighted by the Doric's recording – and the Zehetmair's (ECM, 6/03) – but the Elias's has instantly become my favourite, and I can't recommend it urgently enough.

Andrew Farach-Colton

P Venables

'Below the Belt'

The Revenge of Miguel Cotto^a. Metamorphoses after Britten^b. Klaviertrio im Geiste^c.

Numbers 76-80^d. Numbers 91-95^e. Illusions^f

^aLeigh Melrose, ^aDario Dugandzic, ^aNatalie Raybould, ^aLewis Bretherton, ^aGeorge Chambers,

^aAshley Mercer vocs ^aNick Blackburn spkr ^fDavid Hoyle performance artist ^aKatie Bicknell fl ^bMelinda Maxwell ob ^aOlivia Jaguers hp ^aAshot Sarkissjan,

^aCiaran McCabe, ^aJames Widden vns ^aGraham Lee, ^aLee Boorer, ^aSimon Baker tbn ^aIan Watson

accordion ^aMatthew West woodblock ^aMatthew West, ^aOliver Lowe punchbags ^aPhoenix Piano

Trio; ^aLigeti Quartet; ^fLondon Sinfonietta /

^{ad}Richard Baker

NMC Debut Discs © NMCD238 (73' • DDD • T)



If you only buy one classical disc advocating LSD and sodomy, make it this

one. Philip Venables's debut disc appears following the success of his opera *4.48 Psychosis* and his subsequently signing with Ricordi. It's a multifarious brew, giving the taste of a refreshing new voice (though the sometimes scurrilous content won't be for everyone). Sparseness, queerness and surrealism are constant, and text is prominent.

The Revenge of Miguel Cotto for two male voices and ensemble is a work about boxing. Across five movements, Steven J Fowler's opaque text alternates in spoken meditations and violent ejaculations. Amid the brutality – in the second movement the percussionists hit punchbags – is beauty; the fourth movement presents wistful vibrato strings over pedal trombone. The first *Numbers* piece opens with the statement 'she sculpted the head of the Marquis de Sade from wasps' and takes off from there, Simon Howard's spoken text alternating with string quartet. The second *Numbers* piece features a male narrator recounting a lonely tale to deft touches of flute and harp; in the manner of *Krapp's Last Tape*, we then hear his voice playing through a crackly tape recorder.

By contrast, *Klaviertrio im Geiste* is a rather straightforward intervention on Beethoven's eponymous trio. Over four movements (one of them silent), Venables uses pitch material from the Beethoven to create a serene miniature, faded yet lustrous. Four brief *Metamorphoses after Britten* (played here by solo oboe), similar in style, serve as interludes between the larger works.

Venables's weirdness is rarely gratuitous. There is pathos and the music is in the British suburban surrealist lineage of JG Ballard and Mark E Smith. Closing the disc is *Illusions* for speaker and ensemble, an unholy screed of lounge muzak and glitch on a cruise ship sailing the Styx. Performance artist David Hoyle rails against hypocrisy and venality in amusing fashion. 'The media shifts into your brain', is one of his *bons mots*. Bathetic and compelling, it's performed with a punch. Liam Cagney

Zelenka

Six Trio Sonatas, ZWV181

Ensemble Berlin Prag / Reinhard Goebel

Supraphon © ② SU4239-2 (95' • DDD)



A lot of water has gone under the bridge since Heinz Holliger first rediscovered and

recorded Zelenka's six sonatas for two oboes, bassoon and basso continuo for Archiv in 1972. That unearthing was, for Baroque oboists and bassoonists, akin to many birthdays and Christmases coming at once, such is these works' wealth of fascinating contrapuntal interweavings, finger-twisting virtuosity and emotional range, and all of course wrapped up in Zelenka's unique, 'Baroque experimental' voice. All of which means that, despite the fact that Zelenka's name and music remain relatively little known, when it comes to these six sonatas there is a pretty healthy catalogue of recordings already on the market; not least a vivid and flowing second go at it from Holliger and friends in 1999, this time for ECM.

Still, if anyone is capable of standing up with the best of them it should be Ensemble Berlin Prag, because when the group was formed in 2005 by the three soloists on this album – the Czech oboist Vilém Veverka and Israeli bassoonist Mor Biron, under the guidance of German oboist Dominik Wollenweber – it was the music of Zelenka and Couperin that formed the basis of their repertoire.

Happily this is indeed a strong offering. Broad brushstrokes-wise, there's a lovely bubbling legato flow and sense of effortlessness to the whole, with its sensitive harpsichord and basso continuo support. Also some particularly easy-on-the-ear softer engineering, which leaves just a little bit more space between musicians and listener than is often customary; this approach has reaped particular dividends in No 5's first-movement *Allegro*, where that leaping unison opening is revealed to be every bit as striking – and rather more attractive – when not punching itself straight into our ears. More excellent moments include the three soloists' smart, beautifully shaped and tightly twisted-together realisations of the ornate contrapuntal writing of No 1's *Allegro*. Then there's the B flat Sonata, No 3, where we get to enjoy violinist Jakub Černohorský's effortless gelling with the winds, and the unshowy softness with which Biron nimbly nails the *Allegro*'s extreme bassoon virtuosities. All in all, proper top-drawer stuff. Charlotte Gardner

Selected comparisons:

Holliger, *Bourgue et al* (10/74[®]) (BRIL) 93785

Holliger, *Bourgue et al* (ECM) 462 542-2

NEW RELEASES

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ICAC 5147 (2CD)
Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro*
Erich Kunz (Figaro); Irmgard Seefried (Susanna); Paul Schöffler (The Count); Lisa della Casa (The Countess); Sena Jurinac (Cherubino)
Vienna State Opera Chorus
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
Karl Böhm
(The Royal Festival Hall, London)

Harold Rosenthal, the Editor of *Opera* magazine, described this staged performance on the 13th September 1954 as a 'sheer delight' and went on to praise an exceptionally strong Viennese cast. An excellent live recording captures the atmosphere of this light-footed performance in a packed Royal Festival Hall.



ICAC 5148 (4CD)
Sir Thomas Beecham
Apart from Liszt's *Faust Symphony* and Haydn's *Symphony No. 101*, none of the performances in this set have ever appeared on CD before as far as is known. All the performances are from Beecham's final years, between 1954 and 1959 and have been caught in exemplary sound, notably an extraordinarily memorable account of Brahms' *Symphony No. 2*.



ICAC 5149 (1CD)
**Jacqueline du Pré
Mstislav Rostropovich**
This important live recording of Jacqueline du Pré playing the Schumann Cello Concerto was her first public performance of the work given in the Royal Festival Hall on the 12th December 1962 with Jean Martinon conducting the BBCSO. It has never been released before.

Du Pré studied the Schumann intensively with Mstislav Rostropovich in 1966 at the Moscow Conservatoire and the great cellist is heard here in a hitherto unreleased live recording from September 1962 of the Dvořák Cello Concerto with Carlo Maria Giulini in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh. *The Times* described the performance as an 'exciting and emotionally supercharged interpretation'. A wonderful bonus – Galina Vishnevskaya singing Villa Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 5 with Rostropovich and the LSO cellos completes the disc.

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NEW RELEASES



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Petr Nekoranec *tenor*
Vojtěch Spurný *piano* (Dvořák's Bösendorfer, Wien 1879)



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Schoenberg Chamber Orchestra / Petr Altrichter



*Das Lied von der Erde – the
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Dagmar Pecková's Mahler
discography.*

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'After the Tryst'

'New Music for Saxophone and Piano'

Beamish Caliban **Duddell** Fracture **Fitkin** Bob **McDowall** Mein blaues Klavier **MacMillan** After the Tryst (arr Gerard McChrystal) **Nicolson** Slow Airs and March **Nyman** Miserere Paraphrase. Shaping the Curve **Weir** Sketches from a Bagpiper's Album **I Wilson** Drive **McKenzie** Sawers Duo
Delphian Ⓢ DCD34201 (67' • DDD)



The saxophone repertoire has expanded considerably over recent decades, though the soprano instrument still tends to be overlooked owing to intonational concerns. Not that these are an issue in the present recital, which Sue McKenzie dispatches with faultless technical control.

Caliban (2014) has Sally Beamish pivoting her characterisation between the aggressive and ruminative, while James MacMillan's *After the Tryst* (1988) sounds hardly less soulful than in its original violin guise; the pithy miniatures of Judith Weir's *Sketches from a Bagpiper's Album* (1984) find soprano sax deftly recreating the B flat clarinet timbre, whereas Michael Nyman's *Miserere Paraphrase* (1989), again conceived for violin, draws upon the sax's full compass in music of plangent immediacy. Alasdair Nicolson's *Slow Airs and March* (1994) alternates between those two archetypes such that the slowly evolving airs and lively though expressively unchanging march ultimately merge into the sombre and fatalistic denouement.

Swapping soprano for alto sax, Joe Duddell's *Fracture* (1999) intertwines contrasted melodic ideas in an engaging polyrhythmic workout, then Ian Wilson's *Drive* (1992) is a modest yet resourceful statement by one who has now expanded the instrument's repertoire considerably. More substantial is *Mein blaues Klavier* (2006), Cecilia McDowall taking the poem by Else Lasker-Schüler as inspiration for a forceful study with a plaintive lament as its core. Contrast is provided by *Shaping the Curve* (1990), Nyman's streamlined brand of minimalism here to the fore; after which Graham Fitkin's *Bob* (1996) provides a poised and poetic rounding-off.

A fine demonstration of the soprano sax's potential, in which not the least pleasure is Ingrid Sawers's astute and sensitive accompaniment. Vividly though never airlessly recorded, with detailed notes from Tim Rutherford-Johnson, this is an enjoyable and ear-opening showcase.

Richard Whitehouse

'Debut'

Bowen Horn Sonata, Op 101^a **Kirchner** Tre Poemi^a **Krufft** Horn Sonata^a **Salonen** Concert Étude **Schumann** Adagio and Allegro, Op 70^a **Widmann** Air **Ben Goldscheider** *hn*^a **Daniel Hill** *pf* Willowhayne Ⓢ WHRO45 (75' • DDD)



Ben Goldscheider was a finalist in the 2016 BBC Young Musician, and if

the biography in the booklet of this disc is anything to go by, he hasn't looked back since, making his debut at the Berlin Philharmonie and appearing as soloist with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Aurora Orchestra, among others. So this disc is effectively a calling card for a young artist who already has a fairly clear idea where he's going.

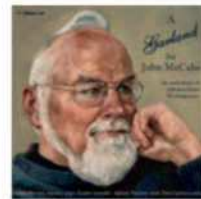
That's certainly the impression it leaves. It takes considerable chops, after all, to open and close a recital with a pair of substantial unaccompanied contemporary works, and both Jörg Widmann's *Air* (2005) and Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Concert Étude* (2000) are unsparing in their technical demands. Goldscheider seems to relish the challenge, making atmospheric, highly characterful poetry out of their echo effects, natural harmonics and rapid-fire switches of dynamics and playing techniques. The recorded sound (the venue is the Turner Sims Concert Hall in Southampton) gives the music ample room to breathe and captures the music's quietest whisper.

The sound doesn't feel quite as comfortable in the items with piano – the horn, in the foreground, is sometimes fuzzy while the piano, further back, is slightly brittle – and nor, initially, does Goldscheider's playing in either a modest, Hummel-like sonata by Nikolaus von Krufft or Schumann's more familiar *Adagio and Allegro*. The technique's there; these pieces just feel under-characterised, though the pianist Daniel Hill does some lovely things with the Chopinesque embroidery of Krufft's slow movement. Things reignite with the sunset romanticism of the York Bowen Sonata and Kirchner's gloomy, gothic *Tre Poemi*: performances of considerable personality and flair from a horn player who must surely have thrilling prospects ahead of him.

Richard Bratby

'A Garland for John McCabe'

JF Brown Evening Changes^a **Carpenter** Edradour^b **Dickinson** A Rag for McCabe^b **Ellerby** Nocturnes and dawn (Patterdale)^c **Gilbert** The Flame has Ceased^d **Gregson** John's Farewell^e **Gunning** Danse des Fourmis^f **Howard** Outback^b **Joubert** Exequy^g **Keeley** Elegy for John McCabe^h **Lipkin** In memoriam John McCabeⁱ **Marshall** Little Passacaglia^e **D Matthews** Chaconne^j **Pehkonen** Lament for the Turtle-Dove^h **Saxton** A Little Prelude for John McCabe^b **Schurmann** Mementoⁱ **Skempton** Highland Song^k **Walker** And Will You Walk Beside Me Down This Lane?^h **Warren** In nomine^e
abfhiik Linda Merrick *cj* abdefkl John Turner *rec*
abcdgik Alistair Vennart *va* bcdefhijl Peter Lawson *pf*
Divine Art Ⓢ DDA25166 (80' • DDD)



Three years on from his death, John McCabe shows no signs of being

forgotten. His music is still performed and recorded (including the start of a survey of his complete piano music) and tributes and memorial events such as the present disc continue to appear. Such is the affection for a composer and performer who balanced creative genius and generosity of spirit in equal measure, with nary a trace of ego.

The 19 works collected here, all composed in 2016, form a wonderfully balanced sequence of pieces large (Raymond Warren's *In nomine* runs close to eight minutes long; the pieces by James Francis Brown, Joubert, Robin Walker and Elis Pehkonen are around six) and small. Although the prevailing mood is elegiac-to-wistful, encapsulated by Joubert, Gregson, Saxton and Keeley, there are plenty which remember John's engaging, pithy sense of humour: *A Rag for McCabe* by Gramophone contributor Peter Dickinson, Brown's *Evening Changes* (one of the few ensemble pieces to omit McCabe's own instrument, the piano) and Christopher Gunning's delightful *Danse des Fourmis* (all featuring John Turner's recorder prominently); Gary Carpenter's *Edradour* closes proceedings by celebrating John's love of single malt whisky!

The musical styles are many and varied, from the formally dramatic, as in Gerard Schurmann's *Memento*, the only piece for piano alone, the abstract (David Matthews's Chaconne, Marshall's *Little Passacaglia*), and straightforwardly tonal (Gunning, Skempton), to more complex harmonic tapestries, as in Anthony Gilbert's *The Flame has Ceased*. Several



Plangent immediacy: Sue McKenzie (right) and Ingrid Sawers present an ear-opening showcase of new music for saxophone and piano

works evoke Haydn, whose sonatas McCabe famously recorded in the 1970s and which have remained a benchmark recording ever since, or use musical ciphers derived from McCabe's name, while Emily Howard's *Outback* evokes McCabe's *Desert* series. Beautifully performed by all four players and recorded to match, John would have been delighted.

Guy Rickards

'Neapolitan Concertos'

Fiorenza Concertos – for Violin and Strings; for Cello, Two Violins and Basso continuo

Mancini Concerto for Recorder, Two Violins, Cello and Basso continuo **Pergolesi**

Concerto for Two Harpsichords and Strings

Porpora Sinfonia for Cello, Violins and Basso continuo **A Scarlatti** Concerto for Recorder, Two Violins, Cello and Basso continuo

La Ritirata / **Josetxu Obregón** vc

Glossa © GCD923106 (71' • DDD)



It's interesting to imagine what kind of a musical London, Paris

or New York we might be looking at today, were any of these cities' excellent conservatories operating a similar portfolio to the ones being worked by the four conservatories of Naples during the early 18th century. Far from being simply the providers of musical instruction, these institutions were truly the painters of Naples' musical wallpaper, providing the performances for its religious services, civil celebrations and patronal festivals, while their well-known composer-teachers' activities equally covered all areas of public and private musical life.

All of which means that a conservatory theme offers rich pickings for any ensemble wishing to showcase the brilliance and variety of the Neapolitan musical Baroque, and that's certainly what you hear from this concerto assortment from La Ritirata and Josetxu Obregón. Indeed, variety abounds across its various combinations of solo strings and recorders, and mix of contrapuntal and *galant* writing.

The instruments on these beautifully shaped, gently buoyant readings are a lovely-sounding bunch, so it's a shame that they are not identified in the booklet notes. So I went and asked. The huskily soft cello of Obregón's which first glides

into play for the disc's opener – Nicola Popora's *Sinfonia* in C for solo cello, violins and basso continuo – is a 1740 Klotz. The airily mellow recorder with which Tamar Lalo so poetically takes the lead for the pair of recorder and two-violin concertos by Francesco Mancini and Alessandro Scarlatti is an alto after Bressan. And the sweet-toned violin with which Hiro Kurosaki dashes off the virtuosity of the concluding ceremonial-feeling concerto by Nicola Fiorenza (who allegedly threatened his pupils with a sword during classes), is a 1670 Rogeri.

Perhaps my favourite instruments-plus-concerto choice of all, though, is Pergolesi's Concerto for two harpsichords and strings, where a colourfully sonorous Flemish model has been paired with a rich, tart German one, because the results are possibly the most ravishing textural combinations on the disc; particularly when the two properly overlay in the central *Adagio*. Beautiful stuff. **Charlotte Gardner**

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Ernest Lough

Jeremy Nicholas pays tribute to the unassuming Temple Church chorister who 90 years ago caused a sensation when he made a recording of 'Hear my prayer' – still much admired today

Ninety years ago – on Friday March 30, 1928, to be precise – the choristers of the Temple Church, London, gathered in the choirstalls with their organist and choirmaster Mr (later Sir) George Thalben-Ball to duplicate a recording they had made the previous year. That recording of 1927 was of Mendelssohn's anthem 'Hear my prayer' (1844), for soprano solo, chorus and organ, with its now famous concluding section, 'O for the wings of a dove'. It had been in the choir's repertoire since the late 1840s and had been chosen as one of the numbers to be recorded in the Temple Church itself, rather than in a studio, using HMV's new mobile recording unit – the first time any commercial disc had been made using this method. The (all-male) Temple Church Choir at that time was blessed with several fine treble voices. One, a 15-year-old named Ernest Lough (1911-2000), was deemed to be in the best voice on the day, and it was he who was chosen to sing the solo in the Mendelssohn. None of the takes from the first session on March 15, 1927, were deemed satisfactory: 'too distant in tone, particularly the organ and solo', wrote the engineer.

Three weeks later the recording van returned and a successful recording of 'Hear my prayer' was made – though 'successful' is something of an understatement. The sales

figures for the disc (HMV C1329, 7/27) took everyone by surprise: in the first month after its release (June 1927), it sold 11,072 copies; from June to December the total was 316,997. In the first three years it sold 712,542 copies. (Compare that with the 1928 sales figures for Dame Clara Butt's famous recording of 'Abide with me': a mere 7334, though by most standards a respectable figure.) Today, that figure has risen to close on six million. It was by far the most successful record HMV had ever made and subsequently became one of the classics of the gramophone. It has never been out of the catalogue.

*There were queues round the block
to get into the Sunday services
to hear and see this angelic choirboy*

What was the reason for its phenomenal popularity? What caught the imagination of the public was not so much the music or the excellence of the choir – fine as these were – as the remarkable voice of the soloist. In his review of the disc in this magazine, Compton Mackenzie wrote: 'I am quite sure that no boy's voice has ever been recorded nearly as well as

this, and I am equally sure that I have never heard such a beautiful one.' It was a view that was echoed by most. What made Lough outstanding – beyond his wonderful tone, effortlessly

secure top notes and warm lower register – was his unusual emotional engagement with the music quite unlike the more dispassionate delivery we are used to nowadays.

Born in Forest Gate, London, on November 17, 1911, 'Fluff', as he was known to all, came to the Temple Church late. He was first a chorister at his local church of St Peter's, and it wasn't until 1924 that his uncle, a bass in the choir of Southwark Cathedral, took him to audition for the Temple Church. Having negotiated that, the boy also passed the entrance examination of the City of London School, where the Temple Church choristers were educated.

I got to know him quite well in the late 1980s while making a radio (and later a television) documentary about him.

A more modest, self-effacing man it would be difficult to imagine, or a more courteous and patient one, answering the same questions about his teenage success that he had answered for half a century. He was genuinely astonished – almost embarrassed – to have become a celebrity and then a household name. There had been queues (my own mother among them) round the block to get into the Sunday services to hear and see this angelic choirboy. Tickets had to be issued, the disappointed turned away. Six presses had to be dedicated at HMV's Hayes factory to keep up with demand.

The recording of 'Hear my prayer' that most people

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1924 – *Joins Temple Church Choir*

Lough's uncle, himself a member of the choir of Southwark Cathedral, arranges the audition.

• 1927 – *O for the wings of a dove*

He is chosen as soloist for HMV's recording of 'Hear my prayer', remaking it the following year.

• 1938 – *Family life*

He uses a total of £200 earned in royalties to get married. His three sons all later become choristers – Peter at the Chapel Royal, and Graham and Robin joining their father at the rebuilt Temple Church after the war.

• 1942 – *Temple Church destroyed*

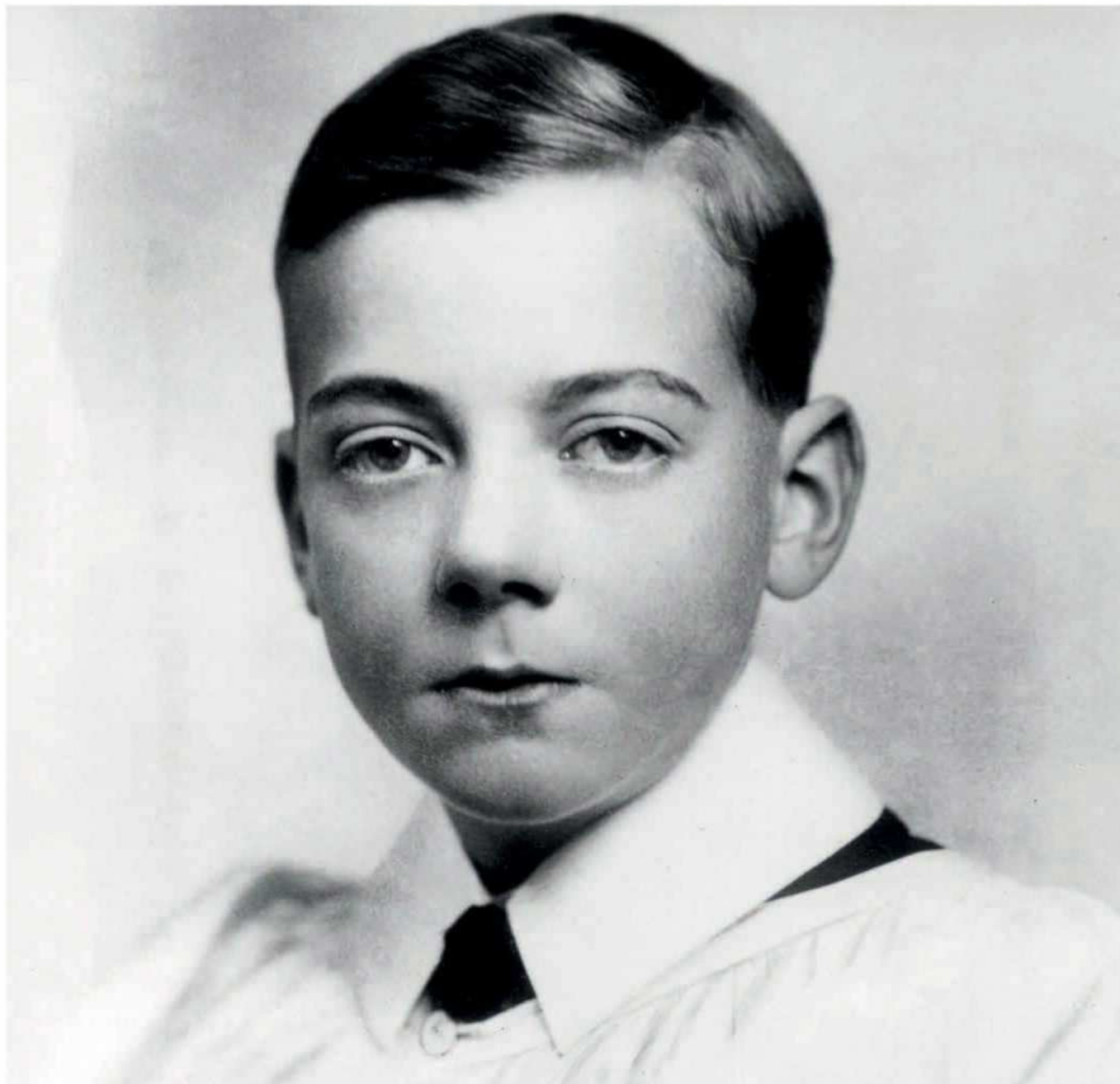
During the Second World War he serves in the fire service – and is present when the Temple Church burns down.

• 1953 – *The Queen's coronation*

He and his son Peter sing in the coronation service.

• 1961 – *For the beauty of the earth*

He records the hymn with Robin on an LP 'Famous Hymns and Organ Voluntaries from the Temple Church'. He remains a member of the choir, still under the directorship of Thalben-Ball, until 1971.



know is not the one made in April 1927. The original masters of this quickly wore out and a replica had to be made – by which time, of course, Lough was 16. There are small differences between the two versions: in the second, Lough's voice is fruitier, richer in tone; the balance is better; the small speed difference between the two sides has disappeared; and, most noticeably, Lough corrects his heavily aspirated second 'hear'. Most people were unaware of there having been a remake, but while the 1927 version created the sensation, it is the 1928 remake that is heard most frequently.

In the year between the two, HMV recorded Lough in duets and several other solos including 'Hear ye,

Israel' from *Elijah*, Lough's own personal favourite, which he famously learnt from scratch in half an hour before setting it down. At the end of 1928, his voice broke. He made a few recordings as a bass-baritone but was more than happy thereafter to embrace the anonymity of the back rows of the Temple Church and Bach choirs. He had a highly successful career as an advertising executive but it was an astonishing

15 months that came to define his life, an all too brief period in which the gramophone captured his soprano voice at the peak of perfection, a voice that can still send a shiver up the spine and reduce grown men to tears. For many, it remains one of unequalled beauty. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'Master Ernest Lough: Wings of a Dove'

Ernest Lough *treb & bar* Temple Church Choir / George Thalben-Ball

Naxos (Mendelssohn's 'Hear my prayer', 1927 recording: 7/27)

This compilation features both recordings of 'Hear my prayer': April 5, 1927 and March 30, 1928.

Instrumental



Jed Distler marvels at Menahem Pressler's delicious Debussy:

'The pianist's deadpan characterisation of the tipsy swagger of "Minstrels" cogently demonstrates how less is more' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 68](#)



Harriet Smith listens to Barry Douglas's latest Schubert:

'Douglas is essentially a pianist of big gestures, well suited to the drama of the fifth Moment musical' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 71](#)

JS Bach • Escaich • Ospital

'Convergences'

JS Bach *Herzlich tut mich verlangen*, BWV727.

Preludes and Fugues – BWV541; BWV543.

Trio Sonata No 2, BWV526 **Escaich** Six

Études-Chorals **Ospital** *Visions* 1-5

Thomas Ospital *org*

Radio France © TEM316060 (67' • DDD)

Played on the Gerhard Grenzing organ of the Radio France Auditorium, Paris



Four Bach works alternate with five of Thomas Ospital's own improvisations

and a set of six *Études-Chorals* by Thierry Escaich. The Escaich pieces date from 2010 and were inspired by Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* preludes, while Ospital's improvisations – which he calls *Visions* – take as their starting point not just the Bach works which precede them but also the notes B-A-C-H.

Ospital delivers those Bach works with great virtuosity. The A minor Prelude has a fluid, improvisatory feel to it while its associated Fugue dances with infectious energy. The G major Prelude and Fugue seems slightly forced, as if such unfettered happiness does not come naturally to Ospital's Bach-playing, but it wants for nothing in clarity of articulation and absolute textural precision. Clarity and precision are the hallmarks of a brilliantly executed account of the C minor Trio Sonata. Ospital's playing of the prelude on the Passion Chorale may seem cold and clinical beside some but well-defined phrasing and an enchanting registration go a long way towards humanising this performance.

Escaich's aggressively dissonant *Études-Chorals* were not primarily intended to display the sound of an organ but Ospital's vividly colourful performances, bursting with virtuoso brilliance, do just that. And demonstrating the extraordinary range of the new organ installed in the auditorium of Radio France in late 2015 is what this

disc is all about. The instrument was built by Gerhard Grenzing, a German organ builder born in Russia, whose firm is based in Spain. Ospital was appointed the organist-in-residence following the instrument's official inauguration in May 2016 and this recording was made the following month.

Ospital's *Visions* most certainly put this vast, 87-stop monster through its paces. *Vision 1*, for example, shows off the *Effet de vent* control as a shimmering array of tremulant-embraced sustained high-pitched notes rise and fade as the wind supply is manipulated by the organist, while *Vision 5* demonstrates to quite amazing effect the programmable crescendo pedal culminating in the very highest pitched stops disappearing off somewhere into that aural area which, it is said, only dogs inhabit. **Marc Rochester**

Beethoven

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 7'

Piano Sonatas – No 2, Op 2 No 2;

No 17, 'Tempest', Op 31 No 2;

No 20, Op 49 No 2; No 30, Op 109

Jonathan Biss *pf*

Meyer Media © MM18037 (69' • DDD)



We reach the seventh volume of Jonathan Biss's thought-provoking Beethoven

sonata cycle. The pieces on this disc seem to suit him more naturally than Vol 6 (6/17), which was dominated by the *Hammerklavier*.

A highlight is the outwardly simple Op 49 No 2, beloved of piano students everywhere, to which Biss gives as much consideration as any of the more overtly demanding works. The first movement combines Mozartian grace with a bubbling excitement and he subtly varies pedalling and touch in the exposition repeat. Alongside him, Richard Goode sounds a tad staid. In the minuet second movement, Biss is again alive to every detail, to beguiling effect.

He launches the disc with another high-spirited work, Op 2 No 2. Biss's booklet notes are, as ever, thoughtful and full of insight, and his description of this sonata's slow movement as 'not a dialogue with the universe, but a thanksgiving' is fully borne out by his persuasive interpretation. However, it is in the other movements that doubts creep in, the opening *Allegro* lacking the quiet mischief of Bavouzet or the anarchic high jinks of Brendel. Biss's playing is unfailingly honed – just sample the Scherzo. But then turn to Bavouzet, who begins almost inaudibly and is unrivalled in sheer responsiveness. In the finale Biss emphasises the *grazioso* marking but again I prefer the greater playfulness of Bavouzet and Brendel.

The very different emotional world of the *Tempest* is also only partially conveyed. Its slow movement is carefully shaded and coloured but it doesn't have the air of mystery that Kovacevich conjures in those opening bars, while Goode captures its otherworldliness thanks to a daringly spacious tempo. And Goode is supreme in his mix of unease and desperation in the finale. Biss, pedalling to quite different effect, creates an altogether more haloed aura.

The last work on the disc, Op 109, is a different matter again and is particularly fine. The pacing is unfailingly astute, the sense of rhapsody in the first movement beautifully caught, the *Prestissimo* full of energy and purpose (though without the knife-edge impulsiveness of Annie Fischer), while the theme of the variation-form finale unfolds with delicate songfulness. I like very much the way the fugal fifth variation has power without edginess and the moments before the final reprise of the theme itself are beautifully coloured, even if they don't quite have the magical raptness of Goode. Biss is beautifully recorded too. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Sonatas – selected comparisons:

Goode (3/94) (NONE) 7559 79328-2

Kovacevich (2/04[®]) (WARN) 562700-2

Bavouzet (8/12[®], 3/14[®], 12/16[®]) (CHAN) CHAN10960

Brendel (DECC) 478 1821DC10

Piano Sonata No 30 – selected comparison:

A Fischer (WARN) 2564 63412-3



Clarity and precision: Thomas Ospital alternates Bach with works by Thierry Escaich and his own improvisations

Beethoven • Haydn

Beethoven Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 2 No 1; No 2, Op 2 No 2; No 6, Op 10 No 2 **Haydn** Keyboard Sonatas, HobXVI – No 32; No 48

Olivier Cavé *pf*

Alpha © ALPHA385 (76' • DDD)



'I never learned anything from Haydn', claimed Beethoven about his

erstwhile composition teacher, yet Olivier Cavé's programme, interspersing sonatas by the young Beethoven and mature Haydn, indicates otherwise. In the opening *Allegro* of Beethoven's first sonata (Op 2 No 1), the Swiss pianist's firm, slightly *sec* approach might be described as Wilhelm Kempff at twice the speed. The *Adagio* stands out for Cavé's well-schooled finger legato, although one misses the breathing room and tender *cantabiles* of Richard Goode's similarly paced traversal. Cavé rightly feels the Menuetto in a brisk, lilting 'one' (notice those deliciously rounded left-hand staccatos), yet holds himself back in the explosive *Prestissimo* finale.

However, Cavé's textural transparency and incisive phrasing delightfully play up

the scampering storyline in Op 2 No 2's first and third movements. To my ears, his *détaché* articulation of the *Largo appassionato*'s bass lines border on exaggeration but his graceful handling of the Rondo finale happily avoids the swan-dive that others habitually graft on to the descending minor sixth at the end of the main theme's opening phrase. Many pianists contain Op 10 No 2's first movement within cameo-like dimensions, in contrast to Cavé's full-bodied sonority and wide dynamic range. Also note Cavé leaning into the diminished chords in his fluent and long-lined *Allegretto*. But the pianist's square and thick *Presto* finale is anticlimactic and falls short of Goode's playful contrapuntal awareness or the late Seymour Lipkin's rhythmic drive (his Beethoven cycle on Newport Classics deserves wider recognition).

Cavé's Haydn proves more consistently engaging. Although he keeps a fast and tight hold around the C major Sonata's *Andante con espressione*, there's enough nuance and character to compensate. The Rondo exudes crispness and wit in Cavé's accomplished fingers, albeit not to Marc-André Hamelin's rarefied standards. No qualifications concerning Cavé's stylish

rectitude and insightful intensifying of details throughout the B minor Sonata, from the *Allegro* development section's strong left-hand presence to the sparkingly dovetailed interaction and alignment between the hands in the Rondo. In sum, the Beethoven selections contain more than enough points of interest but you'll mainly want this disc for the Haydn.

Jed Distler

Beethoven – selected comparisons:

Goode (NONE) 7559 79363-8

Lipkin (NEWP) 59001

F Couperin

Pièces de clavecin: Book 1 – La Favorite;

Book 3 – Ordre 13^{ème}; Ordre 18^{ème}

Blandine Verlet *hpd*

Aparté © AP170 (56' • DDD)



The eminent French harpsichordist Blandine Verlet has again returned to

Couperin, a composer with whom she has been intimately associated since recording his complete works some 40 years ago. I was enthusiastic about her earlier return to this repertoire, which included the 7th,

8th, 25th, 26th and 27th *ordres* from Books 2 and 4 of Couperin's complete solo harpsichord works. It seemed to me then that the fundamental virtues of Verlet's playing – simplicity, clarity, common sense, judiciousness – had simply mellowed into greater maturity and autumnal elegance.

I wish I could be as enthusiastic about this latest release, which includes the 13th and 18th *ordres* and a single selection, the enchantingly melancholy 'La Favorite' from the 3rd *ordre*. The playing is still straightforward, with few quirks of tempo and an even pulse, and she is still sparing with *inégalité* (far more so than she was in her first traversal of this repertoire). But the ornamentation now sounds more laboured and less refined, with simple trills frequently mannered in the way they begin with halting deliberation before snapping to completion. The steadiness of tempos becomes, at times, monotonous and there is a tendency to play everything very dry. The richness and whimsy of her earlier 'La Favorite' has been winnowed away, leaving just the bones of the piece, with only a hint of the lilting quaver figuration she used before. I prefer Rousset in this piece, and in most of the other works on this disc, including Couperin's wonderfully wry, Gallicised take on the Spanish *folia*, 'Les Folies françaises, ou Les Dominos'. Rousset finds the dance spirit within these short vignettes, which Verlet leaves mostly earthbound.

That these later-in-life second thoughts on Couperin are not just more spare, pared-down and retiring than the recordings she made in her thirties and forties, but more so even than her 2012 album (11/12) as well, is perhaps not a surprise. We use the word 'autumnal' too loosely, to suggest a style of playing, when it is, perhaps, more a habit of mind, a retreat from the self and the imposition of self on interpretation. For Verlet, it is an ongoing abnegation, and despite all of the virtues of this playing, its concision and intelligence, I confess it goes too far for me. **Philip Kennicott**

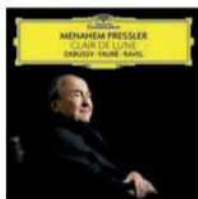
Debussy · Fauré · Ravel

'Clair de lune'

Debussy Arabesque No 1. Children's Corner – The Little Shepherd. *La plus que lent*. *Préludes* – Danseuses de Delphes; Voiles; La fille aux cheveux de lin; La cathédrale engloutie; Minstrels. *Rêverie*. Suite bergamasque – Clair de lune **Fauré** Barcarolle No 6, Op 70 **Ravel** Miroirs – Oiseaux tristes. Pavane pour une infante défunte

Menahem Pressler *pf*

DG © 479 8756GH (67' • DDD)



Many pianists interpret Debussy's 'Danseuses de Delphes' with

steady, stately and often placid calm. Not Menahem Pressler. He takes Debussy's staccato markings literally in the first two measures, clipping the chords to unorthodox effect. At bar 11, Pressler begins to free up the basic tempo, which actually helps underline the music's harmonic tension and varied dynamic levels. Further excerpts from the first book of *Préludes* prove no less revelatory. 'Voiles' is slow but never static, due to Pressler's clear textural layering, with the repeated B flat left-hand pedal points providing a firmer than usual anchor. 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' is a marvel of exquisitely timed chords and eloquent lyrical deliberation. Pressler makes every gesture count throughout 'La cathédrale engloutie', where he generates a shattering, full-bodied climax. By contrast, the pianist's deadpan characterisation of the tipsy swagger of 'Minstrels' cogently demonstrates how less is more.

Although *Arabesque* No 1, *Rêverie*, 'The Little Shepherd' and *La plus que lent* all receive sensitive and lovingly nuanced performances, 'Clair de lune' embodies Pressler's most potent magic. His tempo is quite slow, yet one hangs on every note with bated breath, from Pressler's perfectly placed *pianissimos* to the disembodied shimmer of his ever-so-slightly desynchronised chords.

Pressler brings often-ignored countermelodies to the fore in Ravel's 'Oiseaux tristes', yet despite meticulous attention to details of articulation and phrasing in the Pavane, somehow the music bogs down as it progresses. By contrast, Fauré's E flat Barcarolle benefits from Pressler's fluid directness and virile melodic projection. The engineering is superb and lifelike, while the booklet notes feature Pressler in his own words, outlining his remarkable life story. In all, an auspicious Deutsche Grammophon solo debut for this young pianist – 94 years young, that is!

Jed Distler

Dohnányi

Winterreigen, Op 13. Klavierstücke – Op 2; Op 41. Albumblatt. Gavotte and Musette. Five Humoresques in the Form of a Suite, Op 17. Four Rhapsodies, Op 11

Sofja Gülbadamova *pf*

Capriccio © © C5332 (138' • DDD)



With a recent live recording of Dohnányi's Second Piano Concerto

(HD Klassik) also to her name, Russian-born Sofja Gülbadamova here offers a selection of his solo repertoire. A decade ago she would have had little competition, other than the composer's own historic recordings. However, now that Martin Roscoe has almost finished his survey of all the solo works for Hyperion, with the final volume due next year, the prospects of her making an impression are a good deal slimmer.

Gülbadamova's attractive selection is mainly from the composer's early and mid-career around the turn of the century, omitting works of a more nationalistic character from 1915 after his return to Hungary from Berlin (and thus missing out on the relatively well-known *Ruralia hungarica*). Echoes of Chopin, Brahms and Schumann abound, above all in *Winterreigen* ('Winter Round Dances'), which starts with a quotation from Schumann's *Papillons*. Here and in the *Five Humoresques in the Form of a Suite*, Gülbadamova's playing is elegant and warm but somewhat distracting in its habitual rubato. Not that she lacks subtlety and musicality, and her voicing of textures can be imaginative and engaging. She eloquently conveys the blend of playfulness and emotion in the Op 2 Pieces, and her full-blooded, stirring interpretation of the Four Rhapsodies is a reminder of Dohnányi's status as the greatest Hungarian pianist and (before the ascent of Bartók) composer since Liszt. However, in these more technically demanding pieces she tends to be over-eager to impress, while Roscoe's more contained and atmospherically varied accounts reveal the music's narrative and emotional power to greater effect. Such miniatures as the 1898 *Gavotte and Musette* also emerge more naturally in Roscoe's less interventionist hands.

The only late opus in Gülbadamova's programme is the Six Piano Pieces, Op 41, composed in 1945, in which year the composer's son, Hans, a member of the German resistance and rescuer of Jews, would be executed by the Nazis, reportedly hanged by piano wire. Ironically, Dohnányi himself, in the years following the war, would be accused of war crimes; and, although he was exonerated, his reputation still suffers from those smear campaigns. The Six Piano Pieces can be heard on 'Dohnányi plays Dohnányi: The Complete



Seductive and authoritative: Julien Brocal brings colour and imaginations to the music of Ravel and Mompou – see review on page 71

HMV Solo Piano Recordings 1929-1956', issued on APR in 2004, which provides a fascinating insight into the composer's own performing style: marked by restraint and inner force. For all her evident devotion to the music, and *Capriccio's* pleasing sound, Gülbadamova does not approach this level of idiomatic understanding. Her own CD booklet essay, although patently sincere, is by no means as informative as James Grymes's for Hyperion. **Michelle Assay**

Piano works – selected comparisons:

Roscoe (3/12, 2/13) (HYPE) CDA67871, 67932, 68033

Dobnányi (APR) APR703

Franck

Andantino. *Fantaisie*, Op 15. *Grande pièce symphonique*, Op 17. *Prélude, fugue et variations*, Op 18. *Pastorale*, Op 19. *Prière*, Op 20. *Final*, Op 21. *Trois Chorals*. *Trois Pièces*

Bjørn Boysen *org*

LAWO Ⓜ Ⓢ 2 LWC1147 (158' • DDD)

Played on the Kuhn organ of Uranienborg Church, Oslo



The charming little *Andantino*, Franck's first published organ work dating back to

1858, gets rather overlooked in recordings of his organ music. So it is good that it opens Bjorn Boysen's two-disc set. He does seem to make rather heavy going of it, squeezing every last drop of pathos from the music by means of generous rubato, dramatic swings of the swell pedal and possibly over-playing the hint of *Panis angelicus* in the central section.

This, though, turns out not to be representative of Boysen's general approach, and while he does emphasise the romanticism by means of big dynamic shifts and even bigger tempo ones, in the larger scores he maintains a fine sense of momentum. I am particularly taken by his broad, sweeping yet often quite impetuous account of the *Grande pièce symphonique*, and even more so by the tremendous sense of vitality he sustains throughout the *Final*.

These performances are notable for the sense of space and scale Boysen brings to the music. The *Fantaisie* in A has an epic quality as it works up to its inexorable statement of the big theme, and there is a grand sense of the drama about a well-paced account of the *Pièce héroïque*. I find his playing of the Third Chorale truly exhilarating.

Given the close association between Franck and the organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll, a kind of belief has grown up that only on an authentic Cavaillé-Coll

can the true genius of Franck's writing come across. Yet here we have a Swiss-built organ claiming to be geared towards the 'German romantic tradition' in a Norwegian church. Whatever else this 2009 Kuhn at Uranienborg Church can do, it certainly makes exactly the right sound for César Franck.

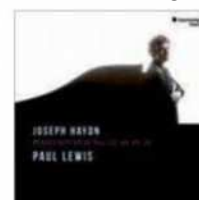
The sound is gentle, smooth, with nicely acidic reeds (I particularly like those that add spice to the *Pastorale*) and a generous if not overwhelming *pleno*. The recording level is low and the sound distant but that only adds to the charm. And with these immensely sympathetic performances from Boysen, we have here a pair of discs which are among the more attractive in the large discography of complete Franck organ recordings. **Marc Rochester**

Haydn

Piano Sonatas, HobXVI -
No 32; No 40; No 49; No 50

Paul Lewis *pf*

Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ HMM90 2371 (69' • DDD)



Paul Lewis has finally turned his attention to Haydn. Hurray for that, for it's a superb



PAUL LEWIS

JOSEPH HAYDN PIANO SONATAS Nos. 32, 40, 49, 50

Haydn's relationship with the keyboard was so intimate and inspirational that it enabled him to develop any number of ideas of the most varied character, from the most whimsical to the most dramatic: highly attractive music – in general dedicated to ladies – that combines mischievousness, ingenuousness, eloquence and lyricism. A whole art of contrast, interpreted with unique grace by Paul Lewis!



Photo © IGOR Studio

HMM 902371

fit; it's also clear that he has absorbed the experience of working with Alfred Brendel as a young man, and the results are nothing if not personal.

For this first disc (surely there will be more) we get four masterpieces that occupy different aspects of the composer. We enter Haydn's world via the E flat Sonata (No 49), whose superficially flippant mood disguises deeper feelings, which become apparent the moment the music touches on the minor. You can occasionally hear Lewis vocalising but it's a very minor matter that certainly didn't distract me from his playing. The extended slow movement combines the Classical poise found in Brendel's reading with a warmth of feeling that is very touching.

Highlights are many but the B minor Sonata (No 32) is special indeed, Lewis relishing its chewy textures, never smoothing over its edges, which makes the moments where there's a softening of tone all the more effective. In the final *Presto* he doesn't go hell for leather but instead offers a grim determination that connects it clearly to the first movement. Brendel is slower here but still conjures a ferocity of intent that can also be found in Andsnes's recording, alongside which the faster Hamelin arguably sounds a touch too brilliant, though his clarity is astonishing.

The genius of Haydn's sonatas is that they can take so many different artistic approaches. Lewis plays up the contrasts in the opening movement of the C major Sonata (No 50), compared to which Hamelin is comparatively introverted, though both delight in the extraordinary flight of fancy in which Haydn indulges before the start of the recapitulation. Here, though, I did find Lewis's acoustic a bit over-generous, which slightly takes the edge off the impact of silence in Haydn's irregular phrasing.

Lewis ends with the G major Sonata (No 40), whose unassuming lyricism conceals the sheer imaginative daring of what is to come, with the movement turning out to be a set of variations pitting major against minor. Lewis offers the full gamut of emotions here, emphasising the G major theme's wistful air at an unhurried tempo (at nine minutes, this movement is a full two and-a-half minutes longer than Hamelin's, whose upbeat tempo is effective in an entirely different way). Bavouzet, always alluring, treads a middle ground here. Haydn follows this with a *Presto*, though he adds *ma non troppo*. Hamelin is undeniably thrilling here, and his wit, like his articulation, is deliciously dry, as if he's sending up the notion of virtuosity itself. Lewis, taking matters at a slightly steadier

pace, finds a more muscular jocularity and reminds us of how much Beethoven learned from his sometime teacher.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Brendel (3/87⁸) (DECC) 478 1369DOR4

Piano Sonatas Nos 32 and 49 – selected comparison:

Andsnes (5/99) (EMI) 556756-2

Piano Sonatas Nos 32 and 50 – selected comparison:

Hamelin (5/07) (HYPER) CDA67554

Piano Sonata No 40 – selected comparison:

Bavouzet (7/13) (CHAN) CHAN10763

Mompou • Ravel • Brocal

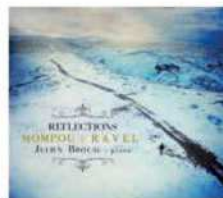


Brocal *Nature morte* Mompou *Charmes*.

Paisajes Ravel *Miroirs*. *Sonatine*

Julien Brocal *pf*

Rubicon ⑤ RCD1008 (71' • DDD)



Julien Brocal, a young French composer and pianist born in Arles,

has studied with Erick Berchot and Rena Shereshevskaya at the École Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot. Since 2013 he has worked closely with Maria João Pires and I fancy her beneficent influence is evident. Last year Brocal made his recording debut in works of Chopin with Rubicon, a company also making its debut (4/17). His new Rubicon CD pairs two composers with Basque connections, Mompou and Ravel.

Brocal is a musician of distinction whose imaginative, intelligent and cultivated piano-playing is at once seductive and authoritative. In fact, the perfection and maturity of his Ravel is little short of astonishing. Brocal's sensitivity to the composer's subtlest indications on the page allows his performances to take flight in a corona of shifting colours and moods. *Miroirs* unfolds in a seemingly inevitable trajectory. From the delicate fluttering of 'Noctuelles' through the distant resonances of 'La vallée des cloches', it is as though we stroll leisurely through a gallery of master paintings. 'Une barque sur l'océan' rolls, swells and subsides in a play of brilliant sunlight on water. A lithe, animated 'Alborada del gracioso' gambols about in the freshness of morning. In the *Sonatine*, Brocal foregrounds Ravel's precision craftsmanship in a reading filled with pellucid colours and shimmering textures.

The same fine ear and sensitive touch, in combination with a superb sense of timing, bring the two Mompou sets to life. *Charmes*, a suite of gem-like miniatures, is particularly appealing. Brocal's own tender,

deeply affecting *Nature morte* is offered as an encore.

If this recording has a shortcoming, it might be that its programming runs the risk of concealing Brocal's magisterial Ravel among the simpler textures, prevalent slow tempos and introversion of the Mompou pieces. It is impossible to predict in what direction Brocal's gifts will lead him but I urge you not to miss the opportunity to hear this singular talent.

Patrick Rucker

Schubert

'Works for Solo Piano, Vol 3'

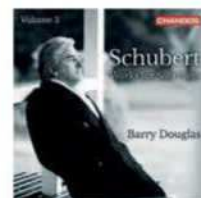
Piano Sonata No 19, D958. Six Moments

musicaux, D780. Sei mir gegrüsst, D741

(arr Liszt, S558 No 1). Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D774 (arr Liszt, S558 No 2)

Barry Douglas *pf*

Chandos ⑤ CHAN10990 (74' • DDD)



Barry Douglas continues his Schubert traversal with the most overtly Beethovenian

of Schubert sonatas, the C minor, D958, whose muscular opening is given with relish. However, doubts creep in not long after, as he slows down for the consoling E flat major theme (1'03"), though it's not marked as such in the score; how much more effective is Paul Lewis here, as he maintains the same pulse. The other aspect that distracts me is the recording itself, which is relatively resonant – an issue I've found with previous volumes.

However, that aside, what Douglas does offer is a sure sense of pacing that means we're never in danger of losing our way in these vast landscapes. He captures the song-like simplicity of the second movement's main theme effectively, though the desynchronisation of the hands (such as at 1'30", where the music turns to the minor) is something of an acquired taste. Compared to Lewis, Douglas sounds a touch ponderous here. Or, for the ultimate in seraphic beauty Lupu is supreme, at a daringly slow tempo that would be deadly in the hands of a lesser artist. I find Douglas's way with the third-movement Minuet pretty earthy compared to the likes of Uchida and Andsnes but his finale has a good sense of purpose and the ending is suitably dramatic.

Douglas is essentially a pianist of big gestures, making him well suited to the drama of the fifth of the *Moments musicaux*, which he imbues with an exhilarating energy. Elsewhere, though, I wanted more delicacy of coloration, something Maria

João Pires provides in abundance in her 1989 recording, whether in the constantly shifting moods of No 1 or the quiet nervousity of No 3. And then there's Lupu, whose voicing in the chordal outer sections of No 2 is a veritable masterclass in subtlety.

Harriet Smith

Sonata No 19, Moments musicaux – selected comparison:

Lupu (4/83⁸, 3/06) (DECC) 475 7074DC4

Sonata No 19 – selected comparisons:

Andsnes (7/07⁸) (EMI/WARN) 516448-2

Lewis (7/14) (HARM) HMC90 2165/6

Uebida (DECC) 475 6282DB8

Moments musicaux – selected comparison:

Pires (2/90) (DG) 427 769-2GH

Schumann

'Piano Works, Vol 11 –

Schumann and ETA Hoffmann'

Fantasiestücke, Op 12. *Klavierstück* (omitted from Op 12). *Kreisleriana*, Op 16 (first version).

Nachtstücke, Op 23

Florian Uhlig *pf*

Hänssler Classic © HC17037 (75' • DDD)



The 11th disc in Florian Uhlig's 15-volume survey of Schumann's

piano music concentrates on works with connections to ETA Hoffmann, the Prussian author and music critic whose stories also surface in Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* and Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*. The series claims to be 'the first genuine complete recording' of Schumann's works for solo piano, wherein the pianist uses the latest critical editions and each disc comes with a scholarly essay by Joachim Draheim. The repertoire is grouped thematically, based variously on genres, places of composition, dedications and associations. Not all of the connections are entirely convincing: for example, why include in the latest volume the *Nachtstücke*, Op 23 (more related to Jean Paul than to Hoffmann), which was composed in Vienna (Vol 4 of this series is Schumann in Vienna) and which, as Draheim notes, is more than any other work of Schumann inspired by family events (Vol 5 was related to his daughters)?

Even though Schumann habitually added titles only after the compositional process, the one undeniably Hoffmannesque work here is the eight fantasies grouped together as *Kreisleriana*, after Hoffmann's *Kreisler*, an eccentric kapellmeister. Uhlig plays intelligently and with controlled sensitivity but his temperament is far from ideal for Schumann, and it is hard to see why he

should be preferred over such classic exponents as Perahia, Argerich, Lupu, Goerner and especially Horowitz (in particular his 1969 version reissued in Sony Classical's massive 60-disc compilation). Uhlig's interpretations are literal and emotionally mid-range, lacking the artistic presence, multi-layered sound design and the magical flights of imagination of Horowitz's mercurial renditions. His sound, while pleasant enough in quieter lyrical episodes, tends to stridency at higher dynamic levels. The final piece, which conveys a demonically intensifying threat in Horowitz's hands, is merely lilting in Uhlig's.

As with *Kreisleriana*, the *Fantasiestücke* provide an arena for Schumann's twin alter egos. The interaction between Florestan (extrovert and explosive) and Eusebius (introvert and dreamy) is captured to perfection in Richter's (admittedly incomplete) 1957 recording, in spite of its clattery sound quality. By comparison, Uhlig is too calculated and controlled, giving us a Florestan determined to impress rather than going wild, and a Eusebius more dreary than dreamy.

Emotional neutrality continues in the opening funeral procession of *Nachtstücke*. Try Schiff for a proper differentiation between suffering and exaltation, between hallucination and dreaminess. **Michelle Assay**

Fantasiestücke – selected comparison:

Richter (DG) ➔ 477 9384GB

Kreisleriana – selected comparison:

Horowitz (2/10) (SONY) 88697 57500-2

Nachtstücke – selected comparison:

Schiff (ELAT) 2564 60026-2

'Fire On All Sides'

JS Bach Das wohltemperirte Clavier – Prelude

No 1, BWV846 Beethoven Piano Sonata No 31,

Op 110 Chopin Fantaisie, Op 49. Nocturnes –

No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 17, Op 62 No 1. Polonaise-

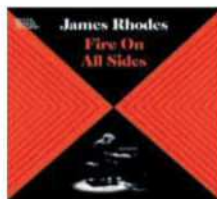
fantaisie, Op 61 Puccini Gianni Schicchi – O mio

babbino caro (arr Mikhailov) Rachmaninov

Étude, Op 39 No 5. Prelude, Op 32 No 13

James Rhodes *pf*

Instrumental/Signum © SIGCD494 (75' • DDD)



The London-born pianist James Rhodes has established a strong presence

on YouTube and in other media in recent years. His new recording, 'Fire On All Sides', is meant as a musical counterpart to his eponymous book, also published this year.

Among Rhodes's most compelling attributes is his sensuously beautiful sound,

particularly in the context of legato playing. Here it is heard to greatest advantage in Beethoven's lyrical Op 110. If a tendency to join phrases diminishes the dramatic impact of the Recitative and 'Klagende Lied' which set the stage for the first fugue, Rhodes negotiates Beethoven's thorny contrapuntal writing with considerable aplomb and clarity.

In the *Fantaisie* and the *Polonaise-fantaisie*, confusion over Chopin's harmonic implications results in misplaced rhetorical emphases. Cross-rhythms are often fudged and transitions either exaggerated or rushed. In an overabundance of enthusiasm, Rhodes is prone to anticipate climaxes, robbing them of their full impact upon arrival. Extended *fortissimo* passages can sound brittle and hectic. Rhodes's somewhat limited dynamic palette is particularly evident in the two Nocturnes, which are further undermined by rhythmic instability and the occasional misreading of note values.

These liabilities are only magnified in Rachmaninov. Rhodes is not the first pianist to bang his way through the mighty E flat minor Étude, as though heroic conflict could be evoked through the remorseless application of brute force. Distorted dynamics and phrase shapes combine with an underlying rhythmic uncertainty to render the valedictory grandeur of the D flat Prelude from Op 32 almost unrecognisable.

Patrick Rucker

'Opus 8'

Kodály Solo Cello Sonata, Op 8^a Liadov Two

Intermezzos, Op 8^b Ligeti Solo Cello Sonata^a

Lyapunov Nocturne, op 8^b Medtner Two Fairy

Tales, Op 8^b Scriabin Twelve Études, Op 8^b

Sibelius Variations^a

Elena Gaponenko ^avc/^bpf

Oehms © ② OC1884 (104' • DDD)



For her second recording, the Russian pianist and cellist Elena

Gaponenko plays a virtuoso solo piano recital on disc 1 and a virtuoso solo cello recital on disc 2. Name another artist who has ever done this.

The title of the release, 'Opus 8', reflects Gaponenko's attraction to the number eight – 'like a Möbius strip or the infinity sign', she explains – and disc 1, subtitled 'Russian Poems for the Piano', consists of four Op 8s, all strong pieces, yet only the last of Scriabin's Op 8 Études, the D sharp minor study made



Solo versatility: Elena Gaponenko plays virtuoso works for piano and cello with equal accomplishment

famous by Horowitz, is at all well known. Outstanding are Gaponenko's take on the second of Medtner's two *Fairy Tales* with its quasi-jazz/South American inflections, and Lyapunov's lovely Chopinesque Nocturne (why don't pianists play this more often?).

Disc 2, subtitled 'Finno-Ugrian Rhapsody', could be a daunting prospect for anyone who, like me, finds 30 minutes of solo cello quite sufficient for one sitting. It says something for Gaponenko's playing that I was completely absorbed – by the Sibelius (an early work I had never encountered before), the two movements of the Ligeti Sonata (the Capriccio is a real workout) and even by the much-recorded (and, in my opinion, over-written) Kodály Sonata. As with her piano-playing, Gaponenko does not shy away from digging deep into the bass register of the instrument to vivid effect.

Albeit relatively brief (52'25" and 51'26"), would you buy each disc, as single recital discs without the USP of two discs of different solo instruments played by the same artist? Yes, certainly you would. I do wish, though, that Gaponenko's booklet biography would back off a little: '... she makes the sonic essence of the messages

encoded in [the music] accessible to the public', while her interpretations are 'inspired by the philosophical view of the works and of the respective composer'. Perhaps it has lost something in translation. Otherwise one might call it pretentious.

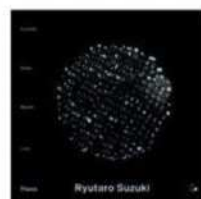
Jeremy Nicholas

'Piano'

Liszt *Réminiscences de Don Juan* **Mozart** Piano Sonata No 8, K310 **Ravel** *Le tombeau de Couperin* **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas – Kk141; Kk380

Ryutaro Suzuki *pf*

Claves © 50-7970 (55' • DDD/DXD)



The Japanese pianist Ryutaro Suzuki will be 28 this year. Since 2008 he has studied at the Paris Conservatoire, the University of Strasbourg and in Fiesole. His ambitious debut release was superbly recorded last spring by Jean-Claude Gaberel.

Two of the most popular Scarlatti sonatas are dispatched with neat efficiency as a warm-up to four of the six pieces of *Le tombeau de Couperin*. Ravel's *Prélude* has a nice flow and the Menuet a wistful,

piquant delicacy. Less successful are the curiously choppy Fugue and a slightly hectic Toccata.

Suzuki's exceedingly polite performance of what is perhaps Mozart's least polite piano piece, the tormented K310, seems entirely focused on proportion. I daresay I've never heard the insistent left-hand chords accompanying the principal theme of the opening *Allegro* more perfectly equal in time and volume, or quite so devoid of meaning. Any hopes held out either for an emotional eruption in the operatic slow movement's middle section or for a sense of desperation in the flight from the Furies of the concluding *Presto* are sadly dashed. Suzuki remains imperturbable throughout.

Something of the same unflappable circumspection prevails in the *Don Juan* Fantasy, here given a crystalline, pellucid and technically immaculate performance. What is missing is a grasp of why Liszt might have chosen to elaborate on the ominous appearance of the Commandatore, the Don's seduction of Zerlina and the wild abandon of 'Fin ch'han dal vino'. In other words, any sense of motivation, poetry or drama. Even the tiniest hint of personality would no doubt do wonders.

Patrick Rucker

Olga Neuwirth

The Austrian cinephile, with her dreamlike, surreal and audacious music, is hugely inspired by director David Lynch, finds **Paul Kilbey**

The music of Olga Neuwirth (b1968) is richly allusive, moving freely between reference points as varied as Monteverdi, Weill, Miles Davis and Klaus Nomi. She has cited influences from Boulez to the Beastie Boys. Yet if there's one artist whose aesthetic approach seems particularly close to hers, it isn't a musician at all – it is film-maker David Lynch, the maverick director behind such cult classics as *Twin Peaks* (1990-91; 2017), *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Bizarre juxtapositions, surreal narrative twists, vivid images of obscure significance: his films are not just strange but also uncanny – even inexplicable at times – as they journey into dreamlike worlds in which the standard rules of time, space and sense seem to drift away. Music may be a more abstract medium than film, but Neuwirth's work proves its ability to be just as fascinatingly unfathomable. Her music is enthralling and provocative not despite its strangeness, but because of it.

Even 'abstract' works of hers, with no apparent visual element, often seem awash with images

The Lynch comparison is one that Neuwirth provoked herself when she turned *Lost Highway*, the film that some call Lynch's very strangest, into an opera in 2002-03, in collaboration with her Nobel Prize-winning compatriot Elfriede Jelinek. It is hard to imagine a more audacious choice of film to receive the operatic treatment, but Neuwirth's fragmentary, multidimensional music creates something that somehow does seem to be the kindred spirit of the original. At one point in both film and opera (some time before he inexplicably transforms into a car mechanic), the protagonist Fred explains why he doesn't own a video camera. 'I like to remember things my own way,' he says. 'How I remembered them. Not necessarily the way they happened.' Perhaps the opera takes a similar approach in adapting the film, twisting it into new shapes – hyper-expressionist vocal acrobatics for one character, deadpan spoken word for another, eerie falsetto vocalise for a third – while retaining the plot and enhancing the noir undercurrent. In fact, perhaps that is what all opera does anyway, taking the kernel of a story and heightening its intensity through clipped lines of text and sweeping currents of music. To be sure, opera seldom portrays events 'the way they happened'.

Jelinek has been quite a frequent collaborator, also having worked on Neuwirth's first full-scale opera, *Bäblamms Fest* (1992-98), which was based on an obscure play by Leonora



Carrington. Also, *Todesraten* (1997) and *Der Tod und das Mädchen II* (1999) both combine (German) words by Jelinek with Neuwirth's unpredictable, ever-shifting music. Among Neuwirth's many other literary projects is an operatic 'Homage to Herman Melville', *The Outcast* (2008-10; rev. 2012), and she is currently working on a version of Virginia Woolf's time-travelling, gender-switching fictional 'biography' *Orlando* for the Vienna State Opera in 2019. *American Lulu* (2006-11) is a reworking or 'new interpretation' of Berg's masterpiece that moves the action to the US and sets it amid the civil rights movement. Another audacious concept, yes, but one that encapsulates both Neuwirth's angular relationship to her Romantic and modernist Austrian heritage and her abiding fascination with jazz, a genre of particular significance to her since she started out as a trumpet player with a desire to be the next Miles Davis. It was only after a car accident in her teens ruled that option out that she focused her attention on composition – but she forgot about neither



PHOTOGRAPHY: HARALD HOFFMANN

NEUWIRTH FACTS

Born Graz, August 4, 1968.

A family of composers Her uncle Gösta Neuwirth (b1937) is also a composer, among whose works is a 'Marcel Proust cycle' entitled *Gestern und Morgen* (1953-96).

Across the arts Neuwirth studied at the San Francisco Conservatory in the 1980s – and took classes in painting and film at the city's Art Institute.

Back to Europe Later, she studied in Vienna and with Tristan Murail at IRCAM in Paris.

jazz nor popular music. 'In the 1980s, I was a punk living in the Austrian countryside,' she has written.

What is the result of all this? A musical style that jump-cuts between genres and reference points at a rate of knots; a language that twists and fragments like a dream narrative. Her concert work can be just as disorientating as her stage work – not that the line between the two is always clear-cut. *Construction in Space* (2000-01) is a prominent example: this 45-minute piece for large ensemble is an altered version of her music for *The Long Rain* (1999-2000), a filmed adaptation of Ray Bradbury's short story of the same name, but the music holds up superbly without the visuals. Something filmic perhaps remains in this hyperactive,

fiercely intense composition, which veers unpredictably from one episode to the next as ghostly electronic interludes drift between – but the sense of cinematic drama does not depend on visuals to support it, not least because Neuwirth requests a peculiar concert set-up in which the four instrumental ensembles and four soloists are positioned square around the audience ('as in a boxing ring') with the electronics overhead. Even the audio recording on Kairos, though, creates a fantastically vivid sonic picture. The work is dedicated to Pierre Boulez, who conducted the premiere of Neuwirth's *Clinamen/Nodus* (1999) in 2000, and she has written of her deep affection for 'the Olympus of contemporary music'. Her ever colourful, endlessly detailed sonic palette is surely a point of comparison – but there is something wild and capricious about the Austrian's music that is also quite different.

It's also difficult to imagine Boulez writing a horror movie soundtrack, but the cinephile Neuwirth did so for the acclaimed *Goodnight Mommy* (2014), a deeply sinister story of

twin boys who don't recognise their mother after she has reconstructive surgery. Neuwirth's darkly fragile score, which features a glass harmonica and a musical saw, whispers drawn-out fragments of lullabies amid a bleak electronic tapestry. Music for film has been significant for her in recent years: as testament to this, two film scores of hers will be heard within two weeks of each other in London this autumn, one at the Southbank Centre (*Maudite soit la guerre*) and one at the Barbican (*Stadt ohne Juden*).

Even 'abstract' works of hers, with no apparent visual element, often seem awash with images. *Hooloomooloo* (1996-97) is a dazzlingly coloured piece for three instrumental ensembles, all circling around a pure electronic tone. 'The composition is a pulsating movement that can attract and repel the listener, draw them in to the sound and throw them out,' she wrote of it. It is inspired by a similarly colourful artwork by Frank Stella, which likewise plays complex, ambiguous games with texture and depth. Her trumpet concerto *...miramondo multiplo...* (2006) weaves an unpredictable web of references (Handel, 'Send in the Clowns', the opening of Mahler's Fifth Symphony) to create a subtle, dreamlike effect. *Remnants of Songs ... an Amphigory* (2009), a viola concerto heard at the 2012 BBC Proms, also delights in the unexpected, or even the nonsensical (an amphigory is a piece of nonsense writing, and Edward Lear is among Neuwirth's inspirations).

Nonsense is seldom just nonsense, of course, as proven by the obsessiveness with which people search for hidden meanings in Lynch's films. The trick, perhaps, is hinting enough that meaning always seems to be just around the corner, only for it to disappear again when you step towards it. Lynch has said he may not even agree with his co-creator about what's going on in *Lost Highway*: 'Barry [Gifford] may have his idea of what the film means and I may have my own idea, and they may be two different things. And yet, we worked together on the same film. The beauty of a film that is more abstract is everybody has a different take.' This is true in an abundance of music as well – and Neuwirth's other-worldly compositions surely revel in this ambiguity. **G**

LISTEN TO NEUWIRTH

Some large-scale works she wrote while in her thirties

**Clinamen/Nodus. Construction in Space**

LSO / Pierre Boulez, Klangforum Wien / Emilio Pomarico
Kairos

Newwirth's huge orchestral work *Construction in Space* is scintillatingly performed by Klangforum

Wien in this 2001 recording. Kairos also released a DVD of Neuwirth's film works, including *The Long Rain*, on which this is based.

**Lost Highway**

Soloists; Klangforum Wien / Johannes Kalitzke
Kairos

An award-winning opera recording from Graz (2003) vividly conveys the opera's manic, sinister energy, with its fine cast including a splenetic David Moss.

**Der Tod und das Mädchen II**

Anne Bennent, Hanna Schygulla *voc* Olga Neuwirth *elec*
Col Legno

Elfriede Jelinek's complex, dark reinterpretation of the *Sleeping Beauty* myth is spoken in German above a subtle and haunting electronic soundscape by Neuwirth in 2000.

Vocal



Jeremy Nicholas samples once-popular Victorian entertainments:
'Cups and Saucers is an impossibly silly story, but with decent songs and dialogue brought off the page with relish' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



Lindsay Kemp listens to a starrily cast disc featuring Vivaldi's Gloria:
'Julia Lezbneva's technique has a solidity and agility that enables feathery ornaments and Bartoli-like "machine trills"' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**

JS Bach

St John Passion, BWV245 (1749 version)

Georg Poplutz *ten* Evangelist **Yorck Felix Speer** *bass*

Christus **Julia Kleiter** *sop* **Gerhild Romberger** *contr*

Daniel Sans *ten* **Matthias Winckler** *bass*

Mainz Bach Choir and Orchestra / Ralf Otto

Naxos ® ② 8 573817/18 (132' • DDD • T/t)



Having the one-to-a-part Scholars Baroque Ensemble and the all-male cathedral forces

of Oxford's New College in its catalogue, Naxos has chosen shrewdly in expanding its range of *St John Passion* recordings to a trio with an all-German, full-bodied choral performance, recorded under studio conditions but heightened by plenty of live atmosphere.

Some open intonation from the keening oboes draws attention to itself in the opening chorus, though their every deviance from well-tempered tuning is exaggerated by a front-loaded recording balance which places obbligato instruments on at least an equal footing with the vocal soloists and privileges theorbo and harpsichord in a continuo section discreetly buttressed by a chamber organ. The chorus is duly recessed; an obstacle to prominence they surmount with exact articulation and impressive dynamic control. Even so, should you really be able to hear every semiquaver of the theorbo in the climactic *turba* counterpoint of 'Lasset uns der nicht zerteilen'? And do you want to?

Ralf Otto's direction of his 60-strong choir and period ensemble is never short on rhythmic impetus, though he goes his own way in pointing the chorales, elongating some pause marks while sailing over others, and he does like a spaciouly marked cadence. Native and forthright feeling for the poetry offers partial compensation for a rather blankly rhetorical delivery of the recitatives: there's nothing vocally to object to in Georg Poplutz's Evangelist or the

Christus of Yorck Felix Speer, but they never challenge the fourth wall in the manner of Schreier or Padmore, McDaniel or Quasthoff.

Such modulated restraint infuses the arias so that the narrative never wanders as it can in the sequence of expanding arias on more starrily soloistic recordings. The tenor of Daniel Sans is projected with more verbal acuity than vocal weight, which does not lend appeal or staying power to 'Erwäge' or indeed to the two long and virtuoso arias in the appendix of items which Bach composed for his 1725 revision. I will return to this newcomer for the reassuring polish and dignity of Gerhild Romberger in 'Von den Stricken' and 'Es ist vollbracht', but for little else.

Peter Quantrill

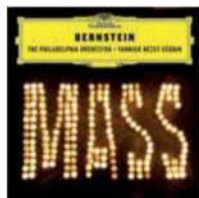
Bernstein

Mass

Kevin Vortmann *ten* **The American Boychoir;**
Westminster Symphonic Choir; Temple University
Concert Choir and Marching Band; The
Philadelphia Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin

DG ® ② 483 5009GH2 (108' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, Verizon Hall, Philadelphia, May 3, 2015



The more live performances, the more live recordings, one experiences of

this marvellous piece the more challenging it seems. No question that Bernstein's inaugural recording – with an extraordinary cast that had been in intensive rehearsal for its premiere – stunned us into a false sense of security. For sure there is much to enjoy in this latest live offering from a conductor I could have predicted would take it to heart and 'get' it. And, like Marin Alsop's Naxos version, the sound here is undoubtedly several notches up from Bernstein's own. But there are issues.

First up, it's good at last to have new tapes for the pre-recorded sections after

years of making do with the originals which had degraded so badly. And Nézet-Séguin has a very talented young artist in Kevin Vortmann for the all-embracing role of the Celebrant – he has the authority, the vocal beauty and most importantly the vocal mix to facilitate an effortless transition into confidential head-voice. Marin Alsop's Jubilant Sykes had problems across the break and there's no question it compromises the vocal writing every time I listen to it. Then again, you could argue that Vortmann is a little too 'legit', a hair's breadth too 'formal' in 'Simple Song' – this is a kid with a guitar, after all, and the song, though anything but simple, needs to feel that way.

But, from the moment Bernstein's marching bands pile in with their syncopated 'Kyries' (an immediate whiff of Broadway in the side drum's rim-shots – a little too polite here), Nézet-Séguin has the measure of the genre-hopping with all its attendant audacity. It's that idea – and it's a key message of the piece – that music as a shared, communal experience can in itself take us that much closer to the divine.

So most of my reservations concern the all-important 'street singers', whose genre-defying 'Tropes' are the life and soul of the piece. Frankly, for all the technical difficulty of their solos, they have to come from the musical theatre sector, from pop, or soul, or blues, but with serious musical 'chops'; and, while Nézet-Séguin might appear to have done just that, one is conscious of a set of skills that is more legit than streetwise and colloquial. Plus there is the added stress of this being a live theatre performance. The First Rock Singer here clearly has trouble freeing the angular rhythms of 'I don't know' and later in the piece I prefer a male to a female in 'I believe in God'. 'God said' is perhaps too feisty a tempo to really nail the words and is a bit of a scramble at the climax. Then again, Sarah Uriarte Berry's 'Thank you' is beautiful.

The 'Meditations' display the requisite intensity – each a moment of intimate soul-searching (for Bernstein and for us all).



Music as a shared, communal experience: Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts a live recording of Bernstein's genre-hopping Mass

The glorious melody that emerges from the first of them points us towards conflict, confusion and a far-off reconciliation: the inevitable moment of catharsis so beloved of the ever-hopeful Bernstein.

For me this whole performance really comes into its own from the Offertory onwards. The fervent Jewish dance of life that springs from 'Gloria Patri!' is tremendous – Lenny asserting his identity and then some. And the way the achingly simple setting of The Lord's Prayer melts into 'I go on' (gorgeously sung by Vortmann) is in itself cathartic – a beautiful confessional of a song if ever one existed.

The great meltdown of the *Agnus Dei* – where the demand for peace that is promised but never delivered spills over into anarchy – is as ever hair-raising. As is Vortmann's emotional breakdown 'Things get broken' (part prompted, no doubt, by the *Peter Grimes* mad scene, which Bernstein revered). The actor must step up here through all the word-play and half-remembered themes – and Vortmann does.

I still could not be without Bernstein's own recording, which has a surfeit of beauty and drama and pizzazz and Alan Titus's extraordinary Celebrant (Titus went on to become a Wagnerian baritone

singing Wotan at Bayreuth). But technology has moved on and this new Nézet-Séguin at very least demands an airing. **Edward Seckerson**

Selected comparisons:

Bernstein (4/72[®]) (RCA) 88697 27988-2;

(SONY) 88697 88086-2 or 88985 34531-2

Alkop (9/09) (NAXO) 8 559622/3

Byrd

'Motets'

Alleluia: Ascendit Deus. Alleluia: Senex puerum portabat. Ave Maria. Ave verum corpus. Civitas sancti tui. Factus est repente. Haec dies. Hodie beata Virgo Maria. Iustorum animae. Laudibus in sanctis. Ne irascaris, Domine. Non vos reliquam orphanos. O lux beata Trinitas. O quam gloriosum. Rorate coeli. Sacerdotes Domini. Terra tremuit. Tollite portas. Vigilate

The Choir of King's College, Cambridge /

Stephen Cleobury

King's College, Cambridge © KGS0024

(56' • DDD • T/t)



The Choir of King's College, Cambridge, and the Renaissance composer William

Byrd are undeniably icons of English music. It is a delight, therefore, to hear them united in these surprisingly exuberant performances which also offer a fascinating record of the sound of King's choir today. I say this because that sound has changed utterly since some of the same motets were recorded under David Willcocks in 1965 ('Byrd and his Contemporaries' – Warner Classics, 9/65). Not surprisingly, close listening reveals a radical shift in pronunciation and interpretation as well as the individual voices of the choral scholars.

Throughout this disc, Cleobury opts for an upfront expressivity quite at odds with that classic, old King's sound, leading to some very exciting moments. Occasionally the trebles lack the finesse and steely control to pull off the sort of performance heard from New College, Oxford, on their famous Byrd 1589 *Cantiones sacrae* (CRD, 12/91). Yet, while I applaud Cleobury's commitment to a more extrovert approach, I do find some of his phrasing choices disappointing towards the beginning of the album. The strong-weak emphasis on dotted rhythms in the opening motet, *Rorate coeli*, strikes me as a Baroque mannerism, and the aspirated melismas in that same treble line shroud Byrd's clear polyphonic

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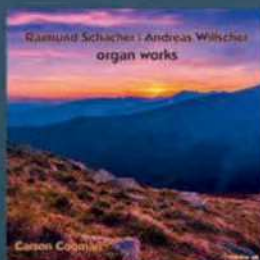
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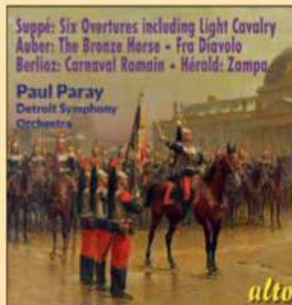
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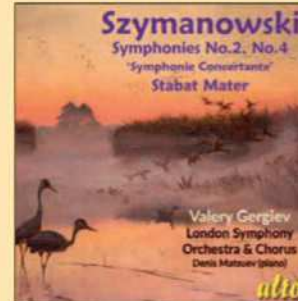
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fabric in fussiness. In the otherwise impressive men's voice performance of *Vigilate*, I find passion and urgency tend towards a rather harshly incessant alto tone.

Yet elsewhere the sound of the choral scholars – fuller, richer and bolder than ever before – pays many dividends. The Lenten motets *Ne irascaris, Domine* and *Civitas sancti tui* are superb, if not slightly too brisk for my taste. More tenderness could be found in Byrd's shapely setting of the word 'Jerusalem' but this is a small point compared to the rich vocal tone. By far the best track on this disc, though, is *Alleluia: Ascendit Deus*. Here, in a higher tessitura, the trebles find more focus and the phrasing flows joyfully.

Edward Breen

Danckerts

Missa de Beata Virgine

Cantar Lontano / Marco Mencoboni

Pan Classics © PCI0327 (51' • DDD • T)

From Amadeus AM306-2 (2015)



Until recently, all most people knew about Ghiselin

Danckerts was that

he was a singer in the Papal chapel and was thrown out because 'he had no voice, was very rich and too fond of women'. There was also a treatise and a tiny quantity of music. But his own report was that he had composed lots of music, which was puzzling because he sang there for 30 years and there is not a trace of his work among the fairly comprehensive choirbooks. Then, 10 years ago, the Italian musicologist Arnaldo Morelli published an article about a previously unknown choirbook in Rome which he argued could conceivably be an autograph of music by Danckerts. The present CD (a reissue of an Amadeus disc published in 2015) contains a Mass ordinary cycle and four Mass proper movements from that manuscript.

Cantar Lontano field 11 male singers, which is roughly what you would expect to hear from the Papal chapel; and they include some of the most famous early music singers in Italy. But the sound is uneven, perhaps because the recording was done in two different churches. Some movements (in particular the *Sanctus* and *Agnus*) sound lovely, while others (particularly the Mass proper movements where for some reason they double the bass cantus firmus an octave lower) sound thoroughly confused. There are also issues of pitch and vibrato. But the music is very odd indeed, as the

conductor's booklet note points out; so this is something for those in search of the curious. **David Fallows**

Elgar

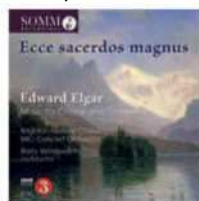
Ecce sacerdos magnus. Te Deum, Op 34 No 1. Benedictus, Op 34 No 2. O hearken thou, Op 64. Great is the Lord, Op 67. Give unto the Lord, Op 74. Spanish Serenade, Op 23. Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands, Op 27

Brighton Festival Chorus;

BBC Concert Orchestra / Barry Wordsworth

Somm © SOMMCD267 (77' • DDD • T/t)

Includes an excerpt from the Benedictus of Haydn's *Harmoniemesse*, conducted by Ludwig Berberich, from a 1949 Haydn Society of America release



Given the prevalence of, and admiration for, Elgar's three large-scale oratorios and

The Music Makers, it is good to hear a new recording of some of Elgar's shorter and by no means less characteristic works for chorus and orchestra, here given by a bright-sounding and committed Brighton Festival Chorus (with commendable clear diction) and BBC Concert Orchestra under Barry Wordsworth. Dedicated to his old friend, Hubert Leicester, choirmaster of St George's Roman Catholic Church, Worcester, the early motet *Ecce sacerdos magnus* was composed for a visit to the church of the Bishop of Birmingham in October 1888. This is a quite a rarity, and, as Andrew Neill states in his informative notes, it has an interesting connection with the *Benedictus* from Haydn's *Harmoniemesse* which, Neill suggests, was quite possibly sung at the Mass. Its musical connection with Elgar's motet is virtually impossible to discern in today's performance practice of Haydn, but a much earlier performance with a far more moderate tempo, helpfully supplied on this CD by the Munich Cathedral Choir of 1949, allows us to hear a perceptible relationship.

The somewhat neglected setting of Longfellow's *Spanish Serenade* of 1892 (full of the composer's melodic thumbprints – especially the wonderfully wistful 'She sleeps') looks forward to *The Wand of Youth* as do the delightfully entertaining orchestral part-songs of *Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands* (1895). These works, along with the *Te Deum* and *Benedictus* of 1897, performed here with affection and subtlety, remind us of the richness of this first phase of Elgar's style and of their importance in the formation of *Caractacus* and the *Enigma* Variations at the end of the century.

The offertory anthem for George V's Coronation of 1911, *O hearken thou*, has pathos and fine control in the sustaining of the long lines. The two larger orchestral anthems, *Great is the Lord*, a setting of Psalm 48 (1912), and *Give unto the Lord*, a setting of Psalm 29 (1914), are performed as if, more appropriately, they were mini-oratorios in that they rightly require the same vivid contrasts from the performers as Elgar's dramatic oratorical canvases (which are ultimately operas manqués).

Jeremy Dibble

S Frankel

War Paint

Sols incl Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole;

Original Broadway Cast

Ghostlight © 84515 (76' • DDD)



The title, the concept, the casting would seem to have

Broadway success

written all over it. A musical about the bitter rivalry between two iconic cosmetic giants – Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden – who never met but here, of course, do (a touch of *Mary Stuart* about this), the casting of two sizeable Broadway divas, Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole (guess who's first on the 'equal' billing), and a title as perfect as it is apposite – *War Paint*. It had to work, didn't it?

Well, hearing the album having not seen the show (it wasn't a smash and closed early on account of LuPone's hip replacement surgery – something you could almost have written into the drama) tells its own story. My word of mouth (and the text and synopsis I have before me) suggests that we are a few products short of a parfumerie on the dramatic stakes. Bitter rivalries apart, there is some intrigue in the ladies' right-hand men – one a husband, one a gay companion – and the switching of allegiances to be exploited in that. And there's the small matter of an intervening world war. But the essence of *War Paint* lies with the larger-than-life ladies themselves and a score from the excellent Scott Frankel and Michael Korie (the writers of *Grey Gardens*) that gives both divas plenty to chew on.

Frankel's sinuous melodies can be so intriguing and Korie's lyrics are smart, witty and always highly literate. More importantly, Frankel seems instinctively to know how to write for LuPone and Ebersole's voices. The legendary LuPone belt is still thrilling (witness her arrival 'Back on top') and you sort of accept the

cartoonish East European/Jewish accent as something that's a part of her large, larger, largest, personality. 'My American moment' is a number I keep returning to for its almost cantorial chromatic melody and the duet 'If I'd been a man' (such a neat idea in the mouths of two powerful women) is super-clever and again melodically stealthy. Neat, too, to have the Act 1 closer 'Face to face' as a stirring emotive premonition of their climactic meeting.

Frankel is such a sophisticated composer who wears his talent and skill so discreetly. There are, of course, the 'glamour' numbers – the touches of traditional trumpet-flaring Broadway – which are less effective divorced from the by all accounts lush staging. But equally there is clever comedy (hard to achieve) in the men's duet 'Dinosaurs', where Korie comes into his own. Love this exchange: 'Love 'em, loathe 'em, they're the stuff of lore / Life don't grow them mammoth anymore. / Never was / Never was any bigger since / Maybe the Smithsonian should mount their friggin' footprints.'

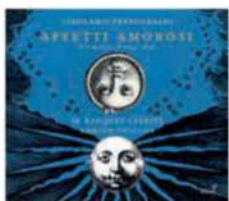
Both ladies get their eleven o'clock numbers, both of which I shall return to: Ebersole with 'Pink', Arden's signature colour, and LuPone with 'Forever beautiful', where among the portraits that 'trap her in amber' she projects a biting irony in Frankel's best Kurt Weillian tones. Custom-made for LuPone.

And, yes, even divorced from the stage, I was stirred by the ladies' 'secret' face-to-face exchange – 'Beauty in the world' – whose storming climax is exactly what you expect from a Broadway score but whose quizzical quiet pay-off takes it somewhere else. **Edward Seckerson**

Frescobaldi

Affetti amorosi – Ancidetermi pur; Ardo e taccio il mio mal; Balletto e Ciaccona; Con dolcezza pietate; Corilla danzando sul prato; Così mi disprezzate; Doloroso mio core; Dove ne vai pensiero; Dunque dovrò; Eri già tutta mia; Gagliarda terza; Gioite oh selve; Maddalena alla croce; Non mi negate ohimè; Non vi partite; Oh dolore; Ohimè che fur; Oscure selve; Passacagli; Se l'aura spira; Ti lascio anima mia; Toccata per spinetta, over liuto; Troppo sotto due stelle; Vanne o carta amorosa; Voi partite mio sole

Le Banquet Céleste / **Damien Guillon** *counterten*
Glossa © GCD923702 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Born in Ferrara, Frescobaldi spent time at the nearby court of the

Gonzaga in Mantua in 1615, just a few years after Monteverdi had left for Venice. The two books of *arie musicali*, published in Florence in 1630, contain music composed in the previous 15 years which adapts the paired pieces familiar from Frescobaldi's keyboard music (the genre which made his reputation) for a vocal idiom. Le Banquet Céleste follow the strategy of a number of other recordings of the *arie* (including the critically acclaimed account by Rinaldo Alessandrini – Naïve) by selecting works from both books while also inserting a small number of contrasting instrumental works, which are here given slick and elegant performances.

The general stylistic orientation of the *arie* is difficult to both categorise and perform persuasively. In the hands of Damien Guillon and his ensemble it is the settings for two and three voices that come off best; there is a good sense of ensemble, added ornamentation is discreet and the wide emotional range of this well-chosen selection effectively delineated. Elsewhere the elusive character of the recitative pieces is not always convincingly revealed, partly because the fundamental and carefully fused relationship between words and music does not come through quite so clearly. Yet despite some weaknesses in Italianate pronunciation, which leads to a lessening of dramatic tension, there are some fine tracks which dispel the myth, beloved of 19th-century historians, that the 'father of Italian keyboard music' couldn't write for the voice. **Iain Fenlon**

Hayes

'Ceremonial Oxford: Music for the Georgian University'

Hayes *The Passions* – Overture; Thy wide extended pow'r. O Worship the Lord. Lo! My Shepherd's hand divine. Lord, how long wilt thou be angry. Organ Concerto in G. Save, Lord, and hear us. Lord, thou hast been our refuge. To God I cry'd with anguish stung. O be joyful in God, all ye lands. The Fall of Jericho – Sinfonia; Whom then does Jericho deride; Will she in gates of brass rejoice. The Hundredth Psalm **Walond** Voluntary in G

The Choir of Keble College, Oxford;
Instruments of Time & Truth / **Matthew Martin** *org*
with **Edward Higginbottom**, **Rory Moules** *org*
CRD © CRD3534 (79' • DDD • T)



William Hayes (1708-77) was Heather Professor of Music at the University of Oxford, one of the founders of the historic Holywell Music Room and a staunch ally of

Handel. This collection of his music for Georgian Oxford is sung exquisitely by the mixed Choir of Keble College, Oxford (reinforced with a few professional extras), accompanied in several pieces by the Instruments of Time & Truth – an Oxonian ensemble that draws from the impressive pool of locally based baroque players. Matthew Martin's keen attention to detail, natural pacing and shapely phrasing guarantee that the varied music on offer amply supports Burney's view that Hayes was 'a great collector of curious and old compositions, and possessed of considerable genius and abilities for producing new'.

Handel's influence is manifest in an overture from *The Passions: An Ode to Music* (1750) and a convivial Organ Concerto in G (composed in the late 1730s) played by Edward Higginbottom with breezy assurance in the Italianate outer movements and gentleness in the melancholic *Andante*. On the other hand, Hayes's fondness for Elizabethan polyphony is illuminated by his adaptation of Byrd's *Emendus in melius* (from *Cantiones sacrae*, 1575) for the unaccompanied English psalm *Lord, how long wilt thou be angry*. Diverse full choir anthems, several accompanied brightly by organ, include the Purcellian harmonic twists of *Save, Lord, and hear us* and the simplicity of *To God I cry'd with anguish stung*; the excellent choir sing with nuanced harmonic shading and flawless tuning. This superb advocacy for Hayes concludes with larger-scale music from the oratorio *The Fall of Jericho* (an oboe-laden Sinfonia and a magnificent chorus in which trumpets and drums make a dramatic entrance halfway through) and a lovely account of a richly concerted setting of the Hundredth Psalm. **David Vickers**

Machaut

'Fortune's Child'

Comment puet on miex ses maus dire. Dame, je vueil endurer. Dame, mon cuer enportez. Dame, vostre dous viaire. Douce dame, tant com vivray. Dou mal qui m'a longuement. Dous amis, oy mon complaint. Gais et jolis. Helas! pour qouy virent/Corde mesto/Libera me. Hé! More!! Dine Amour/Quare non sum mortuus. Honte, paour, doubtance. Puis que ma douleur agree. Riches d'amour. Trop plus est bele/Biauté paree de valour/Jé ne sui mie

The Orlando Consort
Hyperion © CDA68195 (61' • DDD • T/t)



Five volumes in, Hyperion's Machaut series shows no sign of running out of puff.



Deeply impressive: The Orlando Consort continue their outstanding exploration of Guillaume de Machaut's secular music

In large part that's due to Machaut's seemingly inexhaustible invention. The first few selections here illustrate this well, the extrovert three-voice *Gais et jolis* succeeded by the brooding, contorted two-voice *Dous amis, oy mon complaint* and the dancelike, monophonic *Dame je vueil endurer*. Bearing in mind how different to our own were prevailing attitudes towards text and music in Machaut's day, the moods of these settings bridge the centuries almost effortlessly; but then the polytextual motet *Trop plus est bele* reminds us that Machaut was a child of his time, after all. And so it continues, the Orlandos combining in as many groups of one, two and three as possible. As with previous volumes, the programming of this series is deeply impressive.

It's striking that however English they may sound in their approach, the Orlandos project and enunciate Machaut's French so well that one rarely reaches for the printed text. As to the vocal quality, the Orlandos' house style is flexible enough to accommodate a full-throated approach, as in the polytextual pieces, where the individual voices seem to compete for attention. I've mentioned before that the vibrato of the tenor part is a touch obtrusive in places, but the compelling

sense of ensemble easily overrides this. It's hard to single out any particular piece or performance but Angus Smith's solo turn in *Dou mal qui m'a longuement* and the following rondeau *Comment puet on miex* are particularly well turned out. The latter, incidentally, has a sequence that prefigures Solage's famous *Fumeux fume*. That's the sort of observation that jumps out at first hearing, but not necessarily off the page; one vindication among many of this large-scale undertaking. **Fabrice Fitch**

Pizzetti

L'annuncio. Antifona amorosa di Basilila.

Cinque Liriche. Due Canti d'amore. E il mio dolore io canto. Épitaphe. Incontro di Marzo. Scuote amore il mio cuore. Sera d'inverno. Tre Canti greci

Hanna Hipp *mez* **Emma Abbate** *pf*
Resonus © RES10209 (55' • DDD • T/T)



Ildebrando Pizzetti's songs have fallen into near-obscure of late, so this recital, released to mark the 50th anniversary of his death and forming the third instalment of Emma Abbate's survey of 20th-century Italian

vocal music, is an important addition to his discography. He remains a difficult figure for many, partly because of the often uncompromising austerity of his style, and partly because of his association with the Italian far right, about which we could do with greater biographical information than we currently possess. He was, however, a composer of considerable stature: you can't easily overlook the best of his work, which has remarkable force.

Abbate and mezzo Hanna Hipp give us 17 of his 31 *liriche* (he used the term as the Italian equivalent of *Lieder* or *mélodies*), composed between 1903 and 1956. Anyone acquainted with Pizzetti's best-known work, the 1958 opera *Assassinio nella cattedrale*, will find themselves in familiar territory with regard to his rather lofty textual approach. He was finicky as to what he set, preferring poets he considered major writers, whether ancient or modern, though it is hard, on occasion, to share his enthusiasm for some of his contemporaries. Debussy's influence is apparent in his fondness for melodic lines derived from speech patterns, rising and falling syllabically as time signatures shift continuously, a compositional method heard most strikingly in 'I pastori' from the *Cinque Liriche* of 1916. Like many of

his generation, however, he was drawn to early music: both plainchant and Monteverdian arioso lurk behind the beautiful *Due Canti d'amore* and the 'Antifona amatoria di Basiliola', an excerpt from his incidental music for Gabriele D'Annunzio's 1908 play *La nave*.

Many of the songs are notably bleak or stark in mood: Hipp and Abbate deliver them with considerable intensity. Hipp's gleaming sound and declamatory fire impress in the anguished 'La madre al figlio lontano' from the *Cinque Liriche*, in which a mother waits in vain for her absent son's return. One admires her lyrical restraint in the sexually ambiguous 'Paseggiata', which closes the same set, and the suggestive, but sparing way she uses her chest register in 'Scuote amore il mio cuore', a turbulent yet ravishing setting of Sappho. Abbate, meanwhile, breathes life into piano-writing that is frequently sparse but in which every shift of rhythm or colour speaks volumes. The accompanying booklet prints texts and translations consecutively rather than side by side, which can be annoying. The main article, meanwhile, is excerpted, not always ideally, from *A Singer's Guide to the Songs of Ildebrando Pizzetti*, a doctoral thesis by Mark Whatley, associate professor at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. You can however, download the full thesis as a PDF: it's well worth reading it before you listen.

Tim Ashley

Porpora

'L'amato nome'

All' altezza reale di Federico Principe reale di Vallia, Op 1

Stile Galante / Stefano Aresi

Glossa © GCD923513 (149' • DDD • T/t)



Nicola Porpora arrived in London in the 1730s to participate in the launch of the Opera of the Nobility, a new theatrical company intended to dislodge Handel's domination of the scene. Encouraged by Frederick, Prince of Wales (a keen musician and promoter of the arts), the aim was to introduce audiences to the latest Italian vocal styles performed by famed Italian singers including the legendary castrato Farinelli. Porpora's collection of 12 cantatas on Arcadian themes was published shortly afterwards in a deluxe edition aimed at a moneyed clientele, but despite this restricted market they became highly regarded and widely distributed.

Designed for highly competent amateurs, they call upon cello-playing which at times expands into lyrical solo melody (Prince Frederick, to whom the publication is dedicated, was an accomplished cellist), and vocal dexterity crucially combined with a command of a fundamental alliance between words and a constantly shifting nuanced musical language. The harpsichord accompaniment goes far beyond mere underpinning of the texture and at times flowers into its most prominent element.

All this is here intelligently and persuasively handled by Stile Galante, a young ensemble already well known for their admirable emphasis on both research and performance, with the full collection divided between two altos and two sopranos and the instrumental lines beautifully moulded into the texture. Spanning a wide emotional range and delivered with faultless technique, these elegant performances convincingly demonstrate both why these cantatas were so admired in their own time and how Porpora's music came to rival that of Handel. This is music to savour at length.

Iain Fenlon

Schubert

Winter Journey (Winterreise), D911

Roderick Williams bar Christopher Glynn pf

Signum © SIGCD531 (73' • DDD • T)



We're still used to opera being performed in English, not least on record through the

series sponsored by the late Peter Moores, so why not Lieder in the vernacular? The same arguments regarding directness, of allowing the words to be communicated unmediated, apply, of course. Without the theatrical element, though, those words themselves are inevitably open to a great deal more scrutiny – particularly on record.

This new translation by Jeremy Sams – experienced opera translator as well as son of Lieder-expert Eric – was designed with directness in mind, not least since it will be performed by Roderick Williams and Christopher Glynn around schools in the UK. In a booklet note, Sams describes the cycle's protagonist as 'modern ... Nothing romantic here'. His language, therefore, 'has to be modern, detached, straightforward'. He certainly achieves that aim, with both the words and Wilhelm Müller's craggy, laconic narrative coming across clearly.

But those familiar with the cycle in German will take some convincing, I suspect, and they'll note too that several of the translations are more like rewrites. The 'Linden Tree' is mentioned only in the final verse of that song here; there are no ravens cawing from the roof in 'Dreaming of Spring'. Anyone who's read Ian Bostridge's own *Winter Journey* (Faber and Faber, 4/15) will be particularly sensitive to those images of Müller's that have been adjusted or jettisoned.

Such compromises must be counted among the inevitable prices to pay in translation, and Sams's task lies somewhere between unenviable and straightforwardly impossible. But although he sets out to avoid 'the inversions present in all kinds of verse', his versions can nevertheless feel like an uneasy mixture of the modern and the strangely stilted. Poetry is often sacrificed for directness, and I remain unconvinced by references, for example, to the river's 'rush and gush and boom', the rhyming of 'snoring' and 'boring' in 'In the Village', or the description of the 'Stormy Morning' as 'A proper witches brew'.

There's no faulting Glynn's detailed, sensitive piano-playing, and Williams's performances are characteristically eloquent, with the lower reaches of his voice, in particular, sounding in particularly good shape. For me the lightness of his timbre and his precise, well-schooled way with the words mean that this Wanderer's tragedy itself feels a little less elemental than it can. Hugo Shirley

Schütz

'Kleine geistliche Konzerte, Vol 2'

Kleine geistliche Konzerte, SWV306-337

Gerlinde Sämman, Isabel Schickelanz, Maria

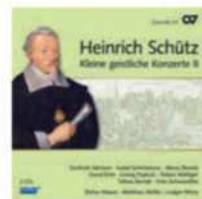
Stosiek soprs David Erler counterten Tobias

Mähger, Georg Poplutz tens Tobias Berndt, Felix

Schwandtke basses Matthias Müller va da gamba

Stefan Maass theorbo / Ludger Rémy org

Carus © CARUS83 271 (118' • DDD • T/t)



It's five years since Carus issued the first volume of *Kleine geistliche Konzerte*

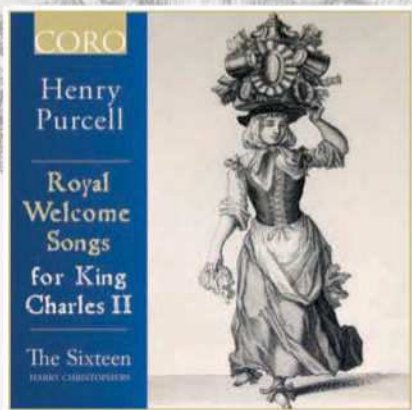
(Schütz published the two sets in 1636 and 1639) and 18 since Weser-Renaissance Bremen published both together on CPO. Most of the cast of the first Carus set appears here; and, as I noted at the time (10/14), the approach taken by the two ensembles is basically the same, despite differences as to pitch level and choice of voice type from piece to piece. That is perhaps the most surprising thing about

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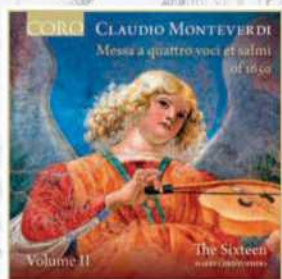
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The Sixteen | Harry Christophers

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 outthere
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this new release: listening to the two alongside each other one scarcely credits the age difference. Given the performing forces involved, there's arguably little scope for differentiation; still, in several fundamental aspects – vocal quality, but especially rhetorical approach and ornamentation (not just in the voices but in the continuo) – significant change is hard to discern. Has a consensus been reached in the performance of this music? And if so, how healthy a state of affairs is that?

None of which is to say that these performances aren't worth hearing. Although with 55 pieces across the two publications it's hard to generalise, one discerns more risk-taking here: this ensemble responds to Schütz's textual decisions with greater urgency – but not consistently, and it's a pretty fine margin anyway. The *tactus* is usually quite unyielding, as though the continuo were leading the singers rather than the other way round. Admittedly, the same could be said of *Weser-Renaissance*; but to my ear, both voices and instruments are more secure and satisfying in the round. (Having alluded to the matter of pitch standard, one might add that those chosen for Carus do at times lead to strain at the top of the singers' ranges.) Finally, CPO's sound recording has a bloom that evades the more closely miked Carus. Playing safe, one could say that an ideal recording would combine the strengths of both; but having listened to many volumes of this fine series, I hope that there's still time for something yet more adventurous. **Fabrice Fitch**

Selected comparison:

Weser-Renaissance Bremen, Cordes
(9/00) (CPO) CPO999 675-2

Solomon · Grossmith

Solomon Pickwick^a

Grossmith Cups and Saucers

Simon Butteriss, Gaynor Keeble,

^a**Toby Stafford-Allen, ^aAlessandro MacKinnon** *sgrs*

Stephen Higgins *pf*

Retrospect Opera © RO002 (74' • DDD • T)



No, not the Cyril Ornadel/Leslie Bricusse musical from 1963 but

Burnand and Solomon's one-act 'dramatic cantata' premiered at the Comedy Theatre, London, on February 7, 1889. Sadly, this *Pickwick* turns out to be very thin gruel indeed, and with no equivalents of 'If I ruled the world'. The story, such as it is, imagines a situation prior to the famous trial scene in *The Pickwick Papers* in which

Mrs Bardell takes Pickwick to court for 'breach of promise'. Will her gentleman lodger name the day – or will she have to make do with the baker?

Burnand's libretto is soggy dated and he is no Gilbert when it comes to inventive, sparkling comic lyrics. Solomon, too, is no Sullivan: his word-setting ability is limp, his melodies derivative and instantly forgettable. I must commend Gaynor Keeble (Mrs Bardell) and the marvellous Simon Butteriss, the Martyn Green *de nos jours*, for giving Pickwick such committed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but the patient, I fear, was already dead on the operating table. In addition, Alessandro MacKinnon as Mrs Bardell's son Tommy had unfortunately lost whatever tonal beauty his treble voice possessed by the time this 2016 recording was made in the forensic acoustic of the National Opera Studio.

Of much greater interest is the curtain-raiser *Cups and Saucers*, a brief (18'18") duologue with book, lyrics and music by George Grossmith, he of *The Diary of a Nobody* (written with his brother Weedon) and creator of nine major G&S roles. It is an impossibly silly story but here, at least, are a few decent songs and with actable dialogue that Keeble and Butteriss bring off the page with relish.

Both pieces are directed from the keyboard with admirable skill by Stephen Higgins. The disc has been produced and packaged by Retrospect Opera to a very high standard and, the reservations above notwithstanding, provides a rare and thus valuable opportunity to hear two late Victorian entertainments that were immensely popular in their day.

Jeremy Nicholas

Victoria

Officium Hebdomadae Sanctae –

Tenebrae Responsories

Stile Antico

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2272 (71' • DDD • T/t)



The works on this disc are taken from Victoria's *Officium Hebdomadae Sanctae* (published Rome, 1585), a vast offering of polyphonic music spanning Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday. What is presented here are the Responsories for Tenebrae services, celebrated in the fading daylight as part of a liturgy requiring candles to be sequentially extinguished. It has become customary in modern times to record the Second and Third Nocturns from

Victoria's *Tenebrae Responsories* for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday in sequence. Divorced from their original context they form an impressively impassioned collection.

This has to be Stile Antico's best album to date: it's certainly their most gripping and, as ever with this ensemble, the vocal sound is sumptuous throughout. That they are so engaging in Victoria's music can be no mere accident: these pieces have a bold recorded history, beginning with George Malcolm's feisty madrigalian interpretation with Westminster Cathedral Choir (Decca, 5/60) and retaining an imprint of that extrovert approach ever since. Of course, the texts are expressive, atmospheric and so demonstratively set that it is hard to retain an English countenance in performance, and even The Tallis Scholars used an unusually robust sound (Gimell, 1/91). It's rather thrilling therefore to hear Stile Antico, who often perform Renaissance polyphony calmly, tap in to the dramatic excitement and atmospheric intensity now associated with these works.

In this recording I particularly admire how the singers find a splendid balance between their rich, blended sound and the need for individual vocal grains to emerge at imploring or declamatory moments. Take, for instance 'Tenebrae factae sunt' in the Good Friday Responsories: here sung by low voices, delineating the darkness of the Crucifixion from the crying out of Jesus in what must be one of the most intimate performances on record. **Edward Breen**

Vivaldi

Gloria, RV589. Nisi Dominus, RV608.

Nulla in mundo pax sincera, RV630

Julia Lezhneva *sop* **Franco Fagioli** *countertenor*

Chorus of Radiotelevisione Svizzera;

I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis

Decca © 483 3874DH (59' • DDD • T/t)



If this is a Vivaldi sacred 'pops' programme, then it's a neat one: the

evergreen *Gloria*, followed by spotlight motets for each of its two soloists, both works that have made themselves loved in the modern-day Vivaldi world.

Nisi Dominus has attracted big-name countertenors from Bowman onwards, with all the variety of sound and approach that implies. Franco Fagioli's voice is dark, firm and possessed of the skill to make each note etched and precise. The powerful richness of his lower register and ring of the upper,

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plus a natural ease with vibrato, puts one in mind of a contralto, so that I was drawn to compare his recording with Nathalie Stutzmann's glowing version with The King's Consort (Hyperion, 1/01), from which it emerges that while Fagioli brings an operatic thrill to the piece, the more relaxed Stutzmann captures more of its hazy Venetian exoticism, especially in the unforgettably atmospheric 'Cum dederit'. Meanwhile *Nulla in mundo pax sincera*, first made famous for us by the silvery grace of the 26-year-old Emma Kirkby, allows the 27-year-old Julia Lezhneva to show off her own pure and vibrato-less technique, swoopy and fluttery at times but with an underlying solidity and agility that enables feathery extra ornaments and Bartoli-like 'machine trills'.

In both of these pieces the playing from I Barocchisti is busy and alert, as it always is under Diego Fasolis, a conductor who rarely fails to blow away a few cobwebs. Though the choral sound in the *Gloria* is a little bland, the tempos are brisk and the orchestra bold and bright. There are plenty of ideas too, from embellished instrumentals to the foregrounding of certain details in the string-writing that you won't hear elsewhere. Mind you, it doesn't always pay to get too clever with this piece, whose simplicity is surely part of its charm. I could certainly do without the short-note 'mi-se-re-re' in the 'Qui tollis peccata mundi' and the long-held final chord of the 'Amen' with (eeugh!) added *a cappella* 'nnn'. **Lindsay Kemp**

'Calen-O'

'Songs from the North of Ireland'

Ferguson Five Irish Folk Songs, Op 17 **Harty**

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Carolyn Dobbin *mez* **Iain Burnside** *pf*

Delphian © DCD34187 (56' • DDD • T)



This CD reminds us of the fount of fine vocal repertoire available from the

province of Ulster. Charles Wood is most often associated with church music and his brilliant career as a teacher of harmony and counterpoint at Caius College, Cambridge (where he enjoyed a long career) and the Royal College of Music.

His brilliant competence as a student is reflected in his setting of Moore's 'At the mid hour of night' (1886), the plangent 'Shall I forget' (1887) of Christina Rossetti and the richly textured 'At Sea' of Moira O'Neill (a poet so favoured by Stanford). The *Five Irish Folk Songs*, Op 17 (1954) by Howard Ferguson, a much underrated talent, are translucent arrangements in their careful choice of harmonic support and accompanimental delicacies. Gems from a slender output, particularly enchanting are 'The Apron of Flower', the delicious 'Calen-O' and the euphonious 'The Swan'. Joan Trimble, a pupil of Howells, is represented by three songs which suit the tessitura of Carolyn Dobbin's full mezzo-soprano tone admirably. Of these, 'My grief on the sea', a setting of Douglas Hyde, and its companion 'Green Rain' stick in the mind for their melancholy introspection.

In view of his prowess as a conductor, we often forget that Hamilton Harty was one of this country's greatest accompanists and that it was in this role that he first earned his living for well-nigh 20 years, often with his wife, the soprano Agnes Nicholls. Songs therefore figured prominently as part of his output as a composer. Especially fine here are the plaintive strains of 'A Cradle Song' (one of numerous settings he made of Padraig Colum), the whooshing textures of 'Scythe Song', the haunting harmonies of 'Flame in the skies' from *Six Songs of Ireland* (1909) and the imposing unpublished *Three Sea Prayers* from the *Greek Anthology* which he wrote for Nicholls to sing at the Bechstein Hall in November 1909.

These are carefully weighed performances by Dobbin, whose light and shade give life to this attractive programme. Iain Burnside, meanwhile, brings panache to the accompaniments, many of them (as one might expect from figures such as Harty) possessing considerable difficulty and athleticism.

Jeremy Dibble

'En seumeillant'

'Dreams and Visions in the Middle Ages'

Sollazzo Ensemble

Ambrony © AMY309 (63' • DDD)



Sollazzo, whose second recording this is, have been making a name for themselves since their formation in 2014. As with their debut CD, 'Parle qui veut'

(Linn, 12/17), this programme focuses on 14th-century Italian and French repertoires, including the songs associated with the notorious but shadowy circle of the *fumeux*. (Other medieval stalwarts, the Song of the Sybil, the Robertsbridge fragment and the Laudario di Cortona, also make an appearance.) Their approach allows mixing and matching different parts on a given written voice, but this is subtly done and rarely distracting (or even perceptible at first hearing).

One gravitates to the *fumeux* pieces, perhaps, because of their substantial discography, but the lesser-known selections are often more satisfying because delivered less self-consciously. The famous *Fumeux*, *fume* feels unresolved: the languid approach resonates with the disc's programme but works against the song's starkly directed cadences. The zest and energy of these performances, with their bright sonic palette and crisp vocal projection, is very engaging; but towards the end of the disc, the energy levels get a touch distracting, the voices almost tripping over themselves as though the notes might escape them. The unheralded *Morte m'a sciolt*, *amor* works better precisely because musical details are allowed to speak for themselves.

Granted, a 'less is more' philosophy may not be what these musicians are after; but the most arresting track here – from the Litany of the Dead, sung in parallel seconds with just the tenor and the two female voices (unless my ears deceive me?) in unison at the bottom of their range – makes the point most eloquently, all the same. **Fabrice Fitch**

'Handel's Last Prima donna'

'Giulia Frasi in London'

Arne Alfred - Heav'n, O hear me! Artaxerxes - Why is death for ever late **Ciampi** Adriano in Siria - O Dio! Mancar mi sento. Il trionfo di Camilla - Là per l'ombrosa sponda **Handel** The Choice of Hercules, HWV69 - There the brisk sparkling nectar drain. Jephtha, HWV70 - Ye sacred priests - Farewell, ye limpid springs and floods. Solomon, HWV67 - Will the sun forget to streak. Susanna, HWV66 - Crystal streams in murmurs flowing. Theodora, HWV68 - Sinfonia; O thou bright sun ... With darkness deep as is my woe; Symphony of Soft Musick; But why art thou disquieted ... O that I on wings could rise **Hayes** Telemachus - Soon arrives thy fatal hour **JC Smith** Paradise Lost - Oh! do not, Adam, exercise on me thy hatred ... It comes! it comes! it must be death! Rebecca - But see, the night with silent pace steals on ... O balmy Sleep!



Graceful sense of style: Ruby Hughes revives music originally written for the Italian soprano Giulia Frasi, including some delightful discoveries

Ruby Hughes *sop* **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment / Laurence Cummings**

Chandos Chaconne (P) CHSA0403
(78' • DDD/DSD • T)



Lest we British get too proprietorial about Handel, it's worth remembering

that his oratorio casts were cosmopolitan right to the end. His favoured soprano from 1748 onwards was the Italian Giulia Frasi, whom her friend (and possibly teacher) Charles Burney praised for her 'sweet and clear voice' and a 'smooth and chaste style of singing which, though cold and unimpassioned, pleased natural ears'. Duly exploiting her vocal sweetness, Handel composed a raft of superb roles for Frasi, from the two queens in *Solomon* to Iphis in his final oratorio, *Jephtha*. An all-Handel-Frasi disc must have been a tempting proposition for Ruby Hughes. Yet in collaboration with Laurence Cummings and *Gramophone's* David Vickers, she ranges well beyond Handel to explore a clutch of mellifluous arias for Frasi by composers on the cusp of the

Baroque and the *galant*. These have been edited for performance by Vickers, who also provides a typically informative note. I was especially struck by a melancholy minuet song from Arne's *Artaxerxes* and a beguiling sleep scene, with softly duetting bassoons, from *Rebecca* by Handel's one-time pupil and assistant John Christopher Smith.

In a personal note, Ruby Hughes pays tribute to La Frasi and the 'lyrical ease' of the music Handel wrote for her; and it is no accident that three of her Handel oratorio roles, Susanna, Theodora and Iphis, were spotless 'sentimental' heroines in the mould of Samuel Richardson's Clarissa. With her limpid purity of tone, immaculately even coloratura and graceful sense of style, Hughes is in many ways ideal in this repertoire. She is never less than touching, whether in Susanna's exquisite pastoral 'Crystal streams', Theodora's prison scene or the aching pathos of Iphis's 'Farewell, ye limpid springs'. Here and in, say, a charmingly scored (with solo cello) aria from Vincenzo Ciampi's *Adriano in Siria*, she excels in dreamy inwardness.

I could leave it at that, and add that the OAE provide sensitively coloured accompaniments (a pity that the excellent

instrumental soloists remain unnamed). Yet at times I wished Hughes had dared more tonal variety, more decisive characterisation. Taking her cue, perhaps, from Frasi's 'smooth and chaste style', she hardly sounds imperious in a vengeance aria from Arne's *Alfred* – not for the only time, more incisive consonants would have helped here. Nor do I hear much sensuous enticement in Pleasure's 'There the brisk sparkling nectar drain' from *The Choice of Hercules*. And for all the fragile tenderness Hughes brings to 'Farewell, ye limpid springs', I wish she had found a fuller, warmer tone for Iphis's vision of paradise at the close. But pleasures in this disc far outweigh these provisos. The gentle beauty of Hughes's voice, deployed with unflinching taste, can hardly fail to give pleasure, the music – not least the Queen of Sheba's valedictory 'Will the sun forget to streak' – often touches the sublime, while the non-Handel items will come as delightful discoveries to many.

Richard Wigmore

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THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Paul Sacher commissions

This native of Basel was a colossus in the world of 20th-century music patronage. **Andrew Mellor's** selection is just a taster of the broad range of music encompassed by his championship – from Strauss to Birtwistle

Paul Sacher (1906-99) didn't just commission new works. He conducted them, toured them, broadcast them, recorded them, took them to orchestras other than his own and presented them alongside complementary pieces from other periods. Was it this tireless work that lodged a significant number of Sacher's commissions in the repertoire? Perhaps. Just as likely, it was an intuitive gift that led him to commission the right composers at the right time, the results of which often spoke for themselves.

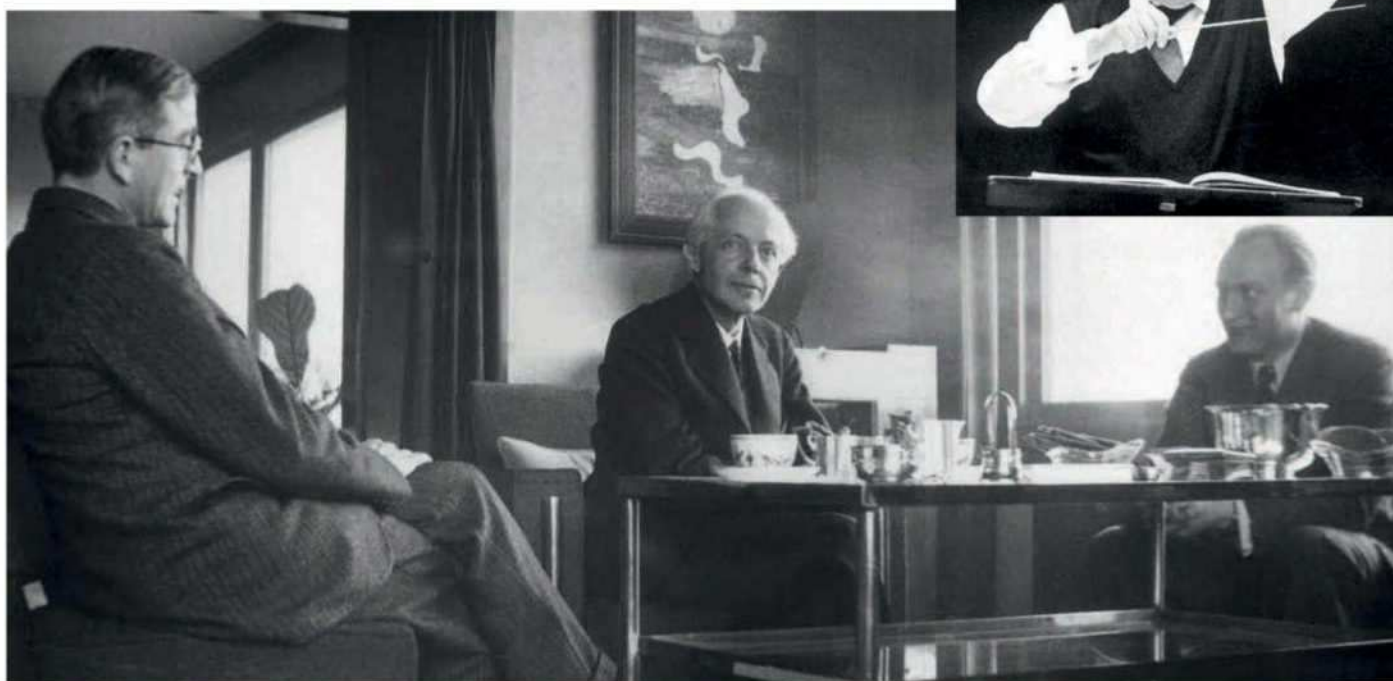
Sacher was not born into money. But he became fantastically wealthy when, in 1934, he married the widowed heiress to the Hoffmann-La Roche pharmaceutical empire – the company responsible for selling Valium. Maja Stehlin was a sculptor and astute patron of the arts in

her own right, but her union with Sacher (who had already founded a chamber orchestra in his home city of Basel after training as a violinist, conductor and musicologist there) suddenly gave him the wherewithal to make a lasting effect on the creative landscape of the 20th century.

He duly did. Sacher conducted throughout Europe (notably at Glyndebourne), but Basel remained his home and the epicentre of his musical world. His Basel Chamber Orchestra became one of the best ensembles of its kind, and his enthusiasm for placing early music alongside new music opened doors to the avant-garde in a way that felt wholly new in the middle of the last century. As well as the Basel Chamber Orchestra, Sacher founded the Basel Chamber

Choir and Collegium Musicum Zurich, conducting the last for more than 50 years. He also co-founded the early music research institute Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

But Sacher's most towering legacy will always be the 200 plus works that he commissioned. Some are staples of the repertoire. Others still lie unpublished, their manuscripts held at the Paul Sacher Foundation (established – yes, in Basel – in 1973). **G**



Paul Sacher (right, and inset) at his home in 1937 with the composers Béla Bartók (centre) and Conrad Beck whose Fifth Symphony was Sacher's first commission

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL SACHER FOUNDATION

**Birtwistle****Endless Parade**

Philippe Scharz *tpt*
BBC NOW / Jac van Steen
Chandos (3/10)

A solo concerto from the pen of Sir Harrison Birtwistle is a relatively rare beast. This, for trumpet with strings and vibraphone, was written to a commission from Sacher and Collegium Musicum Zurich in 1986-87. Birtwistle described his piece as a 'moving frieze'. The fluency that makes the composer's parade move with apparent endlessness is captured skilfully here by the BBC NOW and its own Luxembourgian Principal Trumpet, Philippe Scharz.

**Britten****Cantata academica**

Sols; London Symphony Chor
and Orch / George Malcolm
Decca (10/61)

Sacher's commission was for a piece to mark the quincentenary of the University of Basel in 1960. Britten responded with a work (composed in 1959) 'full of academic devices', one of which is a serialist structure in which each of the 13 sections is controlled by one 'ruling note' of the chromatic scale. But as this lively performance proves, the piece balances its academic discipline with exuberant celebration.

**Tippett****Divertimento on Sellinger's Round**

Basel Chamber Orchestra /
Christopher Hogwood

Arte Nova

This five-movement reflection on a traditional tune (1953-54), with quotations from Gibbons, Purcell and others thrown in, remains one of Tippett's best-loved and most touching works. It was commissioned for the Collegium Musicum Zurich, but there's something special about this spacious performance from Sacher's *other* orchestra under Christopher Hogwood, with notably beautiful solos from the concertmaster in 'A Lament'.

**Honegger****Symphony No 4, 'Deliciae basiliensis'**

LPO / Vladimir Jurowski
LPO (2/12)

Sacher only commissioned composers whom he deemed to be internationally relevant. But he believed a good number of his Swiss compatriots to be just that. Works by Swiss composers make up a significant proportion of his commissions, and this symphonic celebration of the city of Basel from Honegger (who was Swiss but was born in France) is the most longstanding. Vladimir Jurowski's LPO play it with crisp alertness and flowing grace in this live recording.

**Martin****Petite symphonie concertante**

Eva Guibentif *hp*
Christiane Jaccottet *hpd*
Ursula Ruttimann *pf*

Suisse Romande Orchestra / Armin Jordan
Apex (11/91)

Sacher's faith in his countryman was well placed, even if today Frank Martin's music finds itself crying out for a new champion. This breakthrough piece (commissioned 1944; completed 1945) is for divided strings with solo harp, harpsichord and piano and displays all the neoclassical agility that Sacher's ensembles relished and encouraged - assets underlined by this performance.

**Martin****Double Concerto**

Ivo Kahánek *pf* Essen
Philharmonic / Tomáš Netopil
Supraphon

Sacher suggested that composers supplement the Basel CO's string group with *concertante* soloists or percussion rather than blocks of woodwind and brass, which explains the similar orchestration of many of the pieces here. One of Martin's finest creations is the Double Concerto for two string orchestras with piano and timpani (1938), which combines his trademark *joie de vivre* with a sense of foreboding as Europe slipped towards war, a dichotomy captured poignantly here.

**Hindemith****Symphony 'Die Harmonie der Welt'**

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch /
Herbert Blomstedt

Decca

The world got its first glimpse of the opera that would crystallise Hindemith's middle period, *Die Harmonie der Welt*, when Sacher commissioned a 'preview' symphony (written in 1951) to mark the Basel Chamber Orchestra's 25th birthday in 1952. Blomstedt's rich recording of the symphony that develops themes from the unwritten opera appears to support Furtwängler's claim that this was Hindemith at his orchestral best.

**Stravinsky****Concerto in D**

New European Strings /
Dmitry Sitkovetsky
Hänssler Classic

Five years before that Hindemith commission, and celebrating the Basel orchestra's 20th year, Sacher called upon Stravinsky in Hollywood. The result is one of the most delicious and elegant creations of Stravinsky's focused neoclassical period. It also speaks volumes about his way with melody and counterpoint and his ability to create an attractive weave with instruments of similar sonority. The latter is to the fore in this performance, in which we feel the grain of the strings.

**R. Strauss****Metamorphosen**

Berlin Philharmonic /
Herbert von Karajan
DG (5/83)

It can be disorientating to consider that *Metamorphosen* was first performed in 1946, just a year before the Stravinsky Concerto in D. Sacher, who was intensely interested in the future of music, apparently received an epilogue for a past age when Strauss delivered on his commission with his 'study for 23 solo strings' in 1945. For many, Karajan's intense recording with the Berlin Philharmonic will need no introduction.

**Bartók**

Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta Hungarian National PO / Zoltán Kocsis
Hungaroton (A/10)

Sacher got to know and like personally many of the composers he commissioned, but had particular admiration for Bartók. He was fascinated by this delicate, exacting figure, particularly given the earthy ferocity of much of his music. Sacher commissioned the *Divertimento* for strings (1939) in addition to this now iconic work (1936), the unusual scoring of

which was as much a product of Bartók's imagination as it was of Sacher's desire to have the strings of his Basel Chamber Orchestra supplemented by instruments of contrasting sonorities - if they had to be supplemented at all. It's a truly other-worldly musical experience, which magically creeps into life on this relatively recent recording.

Opera



Neil Fisher on Ethel Smyth's comic opera *The Boatswain's Mate*:

'The men do their best with the "how's your father" dialogue yet both come off slightly bloodless' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



Mark Pullinger is impressed by a solo debut from Anita Rachvelishvili

'Here Dalila is a temptress, especially the way she floats her high notes, but that formidable chest register needs taming' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 97**

Giacomelli

'Fiamma vorace'

Adriano in Siria - Sinfonia con corni; Mancare, oh Dio, mi sento; Saggio guerriero antico; Vuoi punir l'ingrato amante? **Cesare in Egitto** - Sinfonia con corni; Alla fastosa, superba Roma; Al vibrar della mia spada; Nel sen mi giubila. **Gianguir** - Sinfonia con tromba; Sinfonia con trombe e oboi. **Lucio Papirio Dittatore** - Dirò quel sangue degno; Spera, sì, presago in petto. **Merope** - Sinfonia con trombe; Fiamma vorace; Sposa, non mi conosci. Torbido nembo freme **Flavio Ferri-Benedetti** *countertenor*
Musica Fiorita / Daniela Dolci
Pan Classics © PC10370 (78' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



Max Emanuel
Cencic, Cecilia
Bartoli and Joyce
DiDonato are

among the many singers to have recorded arias by Geminiano Giacometti (1692-1740) of late, though Flavio Ferri-Benedetti's 'Fiamma vorace' is, to my knowledge, the first recital to be devoted entirely to his music. Considerable care, one suspects, has gone into it. Ferri-Benedetti has edited some of the material himself and supplies scholarly yet engaging booklet notes that point out both Giacometti's popularity in his lifetime and the esteem in which he was held by contemporaries such as Vivaldi and Handel. The arias, some recorded for the first time, reveal an attractive melodist with a striking ability to match sound with sense and an impressive deployment of virtuosity for expressive means as well as display. It's something of a shame, therefore, that the disc itself is uneven.

Ferri-Benedetti possesses an agile alto and an appealing, sweet-sounding *mezza voce*, though you can't quite escape the sense that the vocal range of some of this music lies too wide. His tone can harden at the top and become thin lower down. The title-track brings with it some curious plunges into a baritone chest voice, though his coloratura is effective here with its pinprick staccatos.

Slower arias, keeping him away from vocal extremes, suit him best. 'Mancare, oh Dio, mi sento' from *Adriano in Siria* is a graceful siciliana, finely negotiated and elegantly phrased. Place his performance of 'Sposa, non mi conosci?' from *Merope*, Giacometti's best-known aria, beside Cencic's version on his 'Venezia' album (Erato, 4/13), however, and you cannot help but notice Cencic's greater evenness of tone and sense of line. Directed by Daniela Dolci, Musica Fiorita sound good throughout, the strings warm and buoyant, the brass exceptionally fine in the sinfonias that punctuate the groups of arias. **Tim Ashley**

Meyerbeer

Le Prophète

Marianne Cornetti *mez* Fidès
John Osborn *ten* Jean de Leyde
Lynette Tapia *sop* Berthe
Karel Martin Ludvik *bass-bar* Comte d'Oberthal
Tijl Faveyts *bass* Zacharie
Albrecht Kludszuweit *ten* Jonas
Pierre Doyen *bar* Mathisen
Aalto Music Theatre Choruses; Essen
Philharmonic Orchestra / Giuliano Carella
Oehms © ③ OC971 (3h 35' • DDD)
Recorded live, April-May 2017
Includes French libretto



It's cruelly ironic that, with Meyerbeer performances still

a comparative rarity (apart from, perhaps, in a range of smaller German theatres), to hear his work now is to listen to a virtual reference dictionary of the building blocks of 19th- and even early 20th-century grand opera. For examples: all of Bizet's *Carmen* smugglers, Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* Philistines denouncing Abimelech's murder, Mascagni's *Cavalleria* Easter Hymn and even the Watchmen closing out Act 1 in Strauss's *Frau ohne Schatten* have clear markers here in terms of orchestral effects and colours. This, along with virtuosic vocal writing, was Meyerbeer's strength – the

effects, not always without causes, but standing out from surrounding material soon overtaken by the likes of Verdi and Wagner, creators of more memorable and longer-breathed melodic material.

If you love Rossini's *Comte Ory*, enjoy the stronger parts of *Rienzi* and are open-minded about the apparent dramaturgical gaps in *Il trovatore*, you should feel at home with *Le Prophète*, Meyerbeer and Scribe's very delayed follow-up (1849) to *Les Huguenots*. Not so well-meaning interventions by the premiere tenor's wife, casting disputes and the inevitable Paris problem of getting the audience home at a reasonable hour contributed both to the delay and to musical cuts and changes, many of them (including the presence of a saxophone in Berthe's death scene) restored here in this first recording of an 'original version'.

It's no small credit to Essen's Aalto Musiktheater to mount such an evidently well-studied performance of this large-scale show. The men do better than the women. While Osborn is fully in command of the tessitura (and power) of Jean de Leyde – and is especially clear in text – Cornetti lacks some of the almost insolent virtuosity of Marilyn Horne in the old rival Sony set, especially at the top of the voice. And Tapia's Berthe has sweet high notes but feels a little underpowered. (The saxophone moment in her Act 5 'Déjà mon oeil s'éteint' sounds inauthentically bluesy now but may have had an effect rather like Donizetti's glass harmonica in *Lucia* to 1840s ears.) The male Anabaptist trio are certainly on the case and maestro Carella brings a nice (and rather French) flexibility to the score, making more of a unity of the piece than the grander and more formal Lewis on Sony. The live recording from three shows last spring copes comfortably with the biggest moments and offstage perspectives and, sensibly, omits applause. Oehms's booklet omits an English translation of the libretto or links to find one – a shame. Nevertheless warmly recommended, especially to the curious about opera's history. **Mike Ashman**

Comparative version:

Lewis (5/77*) (SONY) 88875 19478-2



John Osborn and Marianne Cornetti star in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, marked by its orchestral effects and virtuoso vocal writing

Porpora

'Opera Arias'

Arianna in Nasso – Nume che reggi 'l mare.

Carlo il Calvo – Quando s'oscura il cielo; Se rea ti vuole il cielo; So che tiranno io sono. **Enea nel Lazio** – Chi vuol salva la patria a l'onore. **Ezio** – Lieto sarò di questa vita; Se tu la reggi al volo.

Filandro – D'esser già parmi quell'arboscello; Ove l'erbetta tenera, e molle. **Ifigenia in Aulide** – Tu spietato non farai. **Meride e Selinunte** – Torbido intorno al core. **Poro** – Destrier, che all'armi usato. **Il trionfo di Camilla** – Torcere il corso all'onde; Va per le vene il sangue

Max Emanuel Cencic *countertenor*

Armonia Atenea / George Petrou

Decca © 483 3235DH (76' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Max Emanuel Cencic, once dubbed by Tim Ashley 'the cult Croatian

countertenor', brings his trademark mix of flamboyance and sensitivity to this largely uncharted repertoire. George Petrou's Greek period band play with style and pizzazz. It seems churlish, then, to start

with a serious gripe. But here goes.

A prime requirement for anyone listening to these Porpora arias, most of them recorded for the first time, is some dramatic context. Nicholas Clapton provides a decent note on Porpora's writing for the voice, with interpolated comments from Cencic. But on character and plot there's not a word. While we might infer that Agamemnon is railing against the High Priest in a ferocious aria from *Ifigenia in Aulide*, we're told nothing about the predicaments of these mythical heroes, whom they are addressing in their arias and, not least, why.

Still, once you accept this as a vocal concert trading on a range of generalised Baroque affects, you can settle down to enjoy the power, brilliance and sheer technical security of Cencic's singing. With their reams of lung-stretching roulades, Porpora's arias – many of them written for the castrato stars Farinelli and Senesino – are often in danger of sounding merely mechanically flashy. Even with Cencic's virtuoso swagger (has any countertenor ever matched his breath control?) and the band's coruscating energy, strumming theorbo to the fore, a number such as the

bellicose 'Destrier, che all'armi usato' from *Poro* comes across as an extended vocal workout. But Cencic, with his (for a countertenor) unusual depth of tone, always characterises as vividly as Porpora's music allows, whether in the spitfire coloratura of the *Ifigenia* aria or the muscular defiance he brings to a horn-fuelled aria from *Enea nel Lazio*. His embellishments in *da capos* invariably sound apt, with virtuosity tempered by elegance. Unlike the often exciting Franco Fagioli in his all-Porpora recital (Naïve, 12/14), Cencic never goes over the top.

Amid all this high-testosterone bravura, the relatively few reflective arias, all of them musically rewarding, come as welcome oases. Phrasing broadly and tenderly, Cencic is at his most dulcet in a gentle, flute-coloured siciliano from *Filandro* and Teseo's touching prayer to Neptune from *Arianna*; and, abetted by the band's precisely coloured accompaniments, he finds an aptly plangent quality for a lament from *Meride e Selinunte* and the fearful 'Va, per le vene il sangue' from *Il trionfo di Camilla*. Just don't ask who, or what, has prompted all this agonised emoting. **Richard Wigmore**

OPERA

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KÁTYA KABANOVÁ

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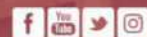
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Edward Lee *ten* Harry Benn
Jeremy Huw Williams *bar* Ned Travers
Simon Wilding *bass* Policeman
Ted Schmitz *ten* The Man
Rebecca Louise Dale *mez* Mary Ann
Lontano Ensemble / Odaline de la Martinez
 Retrospect Opera Ⓜ ② RO001 (121' • DDD)
 Includes synopsis and libretto



'I want a great rollicking sound', Ethel Smyth told the BBC Symphony

Orchestra at rehearsals for her 1914 comic opera. Prepare yourself to be only mildly rollicked by this, the first complete recording of a work that travelled around the UK to acclaim during the composer's lifetime but has since fallen into obscurity. Now it's been brought back by the Lontano Ensemble, conducted by Odaline de la Martinez, a strong champion of Smyth's work – austerity presumably the reason why the conductor has opted for the smaller of the two chamber orchestrations prepared by the composer.

The new recording, which for some reason has taken almost two years to be released, is a cheerful effort at a pleasant but unmemorable work. The boatswain is the (now retired) Mr Benn, who concocts a daft plan involving Travers, an ex-army man down on his luck, in order to woo a redoubtable widow, pub landlord Mrs Waters – something of a British seaside counterpart to Puccini's Minnie in *La fanciulla del West*.

Smyth tips her hat to different traditions: thematically, the short domestic farce goes back to the intermezzo tradition of Pergolesi, but there are more authentically British elements of music hall, John Gay and Arthur Sullivan all mixed in. Unusually, Smyth opts for a first half alternating speech and song, then ditches the spoken words in the second half as Benn's plan goes very wrong and Travers and Mrs Waters realise the future might not be so lonely after all. The most persuasive weapon in Smyth's armoury is her use of traditional folk songs, which give a warmly nostalgic undercurrent.

The composer struggles, however, to give much interior life to the characters, or to give them musical space to breathe: her text, adapted from WW Jacobs's story,

is wordy and meandering, and where the pratfalls of the second half should rattle along like Falstaff being dumped into the Thames, Smyth is neither a Verdi nor a Boito and it all rumbles along rather placidly. Sharper and nimbler playing from the Lontano Ensemble might have helped too.

Dramatically, what's most intriguing about the premise is that Travers, Benn and Mrs Waters are rather shopworn: people who know their best days are behind them. So it's a little perverse that three young singers tackle these parts. The men, Jeremy Huw Williams's Travers and Edward Lee's Benn, do their best with the 'how's your father' dialogue yet both come off slightly bloodless. Nadine Benjamin sings sweetly and purely as Mrs Waters – but you don't really hear a wistful widow here. By contrast, in excerpts recorded under the composer's baton in 1916, also included on this album, you can listen to the original exponent of the part, Rosina Buckman. And her ardent delivery of the standout number, 'What if I were young again', Smyth's bittersweet nod to the folk song 'Lord Randall', is simply in another league.

Neil Fisher

Wagner

Tristan und Isolde

Fritz Uhl *ten* Tristan
Arnold van Mill *bass* Marke
Birgit Nilsson *sop* Isolde
Tom Krause *bar* Kurwenal
Ernst Kozub *ten* Melot
Regina Resnick *sop* Brangäne
Waldemar Kmentt *ten* Young Sailor
Theodor Kirschbichler *bar* Steersman
Peter Klein *ten* Shepherd
Choral Society of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde / Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Georg Solti
 Decca Ⓜ ④ (③ + ②) 483 2513DHO4
 (4h • ADD • Dolby True-HD)
 From Ⓢ SET204-8 (3/61, 4/61)
 Blu-ray includes 'The Birth of an Opera' - Tristan und Isolde in rehearsal
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Wagner

Parsifal

René Kollo *ten* Parsifal
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau *bar* Amfortas
Gottlob Frick *bass* Gurnemanz
Christa Ludewig *mez* Kundry
Zoltán Kelemen *bar* Klingsor
Hans Hotter *bass-bar* Titirel
Birgit Finnilä *contr* Voice from Above
Lucia Popp, Alison Hargan, Kiri Te Kanawa *sops*
Anne Howells, Margarita Lilowa *mezs*

Gillian Knight *contr* Flower Maidens
Robert Tear *ten* **Herbert Lackner** *bass* Knights
Rotraud Hansmann, Marga Schiml *sops*
Heinz Zednik *ten* **Ewald Eichberger** *bar* Squires
Vienna Boys' Choir; Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Sir Georg Solti
 Decca Ⓜ ⑤ (④ + ②) 483 2510DHO5
 (4h 20' • ADD • Dolby True-HD)
 From Ⓢ SET550-4 (4/73)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



After Solti's two Strauss one-acters with Birgit Nilsson (10/17), Decca now gives the lavish hi-res reissue treatment to two more of his recordings from Vienna. As with those earlier releases, both the 1960 *Tristan* and the 1973 *Parsifal* scrub up very well in their new guises, revealing a wonderful wealth of detail and vividness, if also showing up a few seams in the editing process (especially in the *Tristan*). Their reissue offers the chance, though, for a reappraisal of two sets that have never really established themselves in the recorded Wagnerian canon – at least not like certain other Solti Wagner recordings.

With the *Tristan*, the reasons are perhaps not too difficult to find. Despite it featuring the same soprano-conductor combination as that *Elektra* and *Salome* – not to mention the Decca *Ring* – it finds neither of them on ideal form. The reprinted cover inadvertently points to another issue with the release: the names of Nilsson and Solti are given pride of place, with the name of the Tristan relegated, with the others, to something like a bit part.

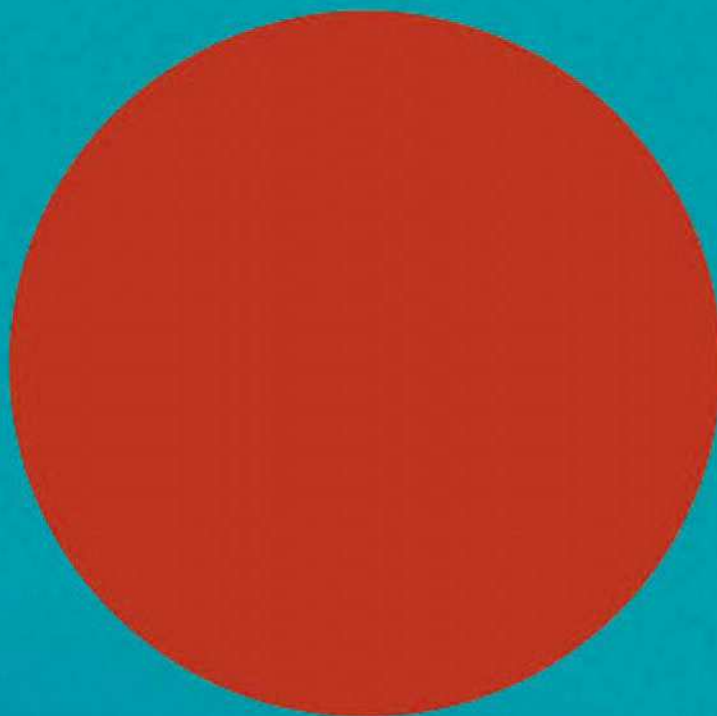
Admittedly, that name, Fritz Uhl, has not secured its place in vocal Valhalla, and he is very much a weak link. The voice is occasionally appealing but never heroic: he bobs around helplessly in Wagnerian waters made especially choppy by an apparently impatient Solti. But even Nilsson herself can struggle to assert herself against Solti's Vienna Philharmonic – strident and somewhat stringy of tone in a score that demands something more yielding and seductive.

One can tell that it's still early days for the soprano in a role that she would make her own: she's heard to much better effect in the Böhm-Bayreuth set, which also benefits from what she'd learnt from working with Wieland Wagner. Tom

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Krause's lively Kurwenal is the best among the rest of the cast. There are some thrills, undeniably, to hearing the fierce orchestral performance dusted off, and there's a welcome bonus in the form of a contemporary radio documentary (presented by John Culshaw) about the recording, although a segment featuring Solti at the piano duetting with Uhl sounds suspiciously like a singalong around a pub piano.

The *Parsifal* is a far more impressive achievement. Solti is in less of a mad rush and paces the score extremely well, despite never really getting that close, to my ears, to its spiritual heart. Despite the cleaned-up remastering, the orchestral sound is still a little short on bloom and roundness, with a slight reediness to the violins and a thinness to the oboe.

The cast is a serious, much better-balanced line-up, though. Gottlob Frick, an implacable Hagen and Hunding in Solti's *Ring*, is an honest, moving Gurnemanz; his bass, though showing its age, is sonorous and imposing. René Kollo is an impressive, fresh-voiced Parsifal and Christa Ludwig a gloriously seductive Kundry. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau makes a convincing Amfortas, though with a little help, one suspects, from the engineers. Hans Hotter certainly leaves no doubt as to Titurel's frail condition. A bunch of Flower Maidens that includes Lucia Popp and Kiri Te Kanawa is not to be sniffed at.

Both releases are amply documented, and Culshaw's lengthy note on the *Tristan* recording (it was Christopher Raeburn by the time of *Parsifal*) is particularly revealing, not least regarding the way in which his engineering favours the orchestra. Neither of these sets would be a first choice, least of all the *Tristan*, but both are important documents that fully deserve the treatment they get here.

Hugo Shirley

Tristan und Isolde – selected comparison:

Böhm (1/67th) (DG) 449 772-2G0R3

or 479 7291GM4

Weinberger

Wallenstein

Roman Trekel barWallenstein
Martina Welschenbach sop Thekla
Ralf Lukas bass-bar Octavio Piccolomini
Daniel Kirch ten Max Piccolomini
Dagmar Schellenberger sop Countess Terzky
Roman Sadnik ten Count Terzky
Edwing Tenias bass-bar Illo
Georg Lehner bar Buttler
ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra, Vienna /
Cornelius Meister

CPO    CPO777 963-2 (131' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna,
 June 15, 2012

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



That it took a
 Bohemian Jew
 to bring
 Germany's

foundational drama of nationhood to the lyric stage was an irony probably not lost on Jaromír Weinberger himself. Just as English composers have fought shy of writing Shakespeare operas, so the closest that native Romantic composers came to setting Schiller was in the emerging genre of concert overtures such as *The Bride of Messina* by Ries and Schumann; they would leave the mountain to be climbed by a select few foreigners including Rossini with *William Tell* and Tchaikovsky with *The Maid of Orleans*. Only Verdi was up to the challenge of a sustained engagement undertaken from 1845 (*Giovanna d'Arco*) to 1867 (*Don Carlo*), and even he passed up Schiller's trilogy of history plays about a brilliant general of fatally over-reaching ambition. The first Wallenstein opera was written in 1876 by (of all people) Luigi Denza, he of 'Funiculi, funiculà'.

The composer of *Schwanda the Bagpiper* is, on the surface of it, a scarcely more plausible candidate for doing justice to an epic historical tragedy which ran to 10 hours when Peter Stein produced it complete in 2007. Condensed to a little over a fifth of that length by Weinberger, his librettist Miloš Kareš and Max Brod, the back-translator of this German version, the opera suffers from a pervasive sense of strain in several directions. The focal point of Schiller's prologue (Wallenstein's Camp, the subject of a vivid tone-poem by Weinberger's countryman Smetana) is a moral tirade against Wallenstein's plundering troops delivered by a capuchin monk. On CD, he's just another angry bass. To the title-figure is granted an 'Uneasy lies the head' monologue of crumbling power, but it arrives too early in the piece and is over before Wallenstein or our understanding of him can develop through its course; here is no Henry IV, or for that matter Wotan or Boris, even if they cast fleeting shadows over both music and text.

At the opera's first run of only four performances in Vienna, November 1937,

critics turned Weinberger's very versatility against him, and it is tempting to share their reservations over a score that jumps neurotically from scene to scene and even phrase to phrase between military pomp and parody, orchestrally stripped-back visions of Korngold and Puccini, and the operetta style that was the composer's stock-in-trade, largely reserved here for the romantic subplot which falls short of counterbalancing a preponderance of plotting and barking generalissimi.

Just over a year later, Weinberger sought to put aesthetic clear water between himself and Alban Berg, just as he had done physically by emigrating to the US: 'He was a composer of decadence. I am a composer of the past ... This time, the time in which we are living, has nothing to say to me and I do not expect it ever to say anything.' Yet a further irony is that *Wallenstein* belongs to its time as wholly as *Lulu*, premiered in Berlin five months earlier. How literally it may be read as an allegory (Albrecht Wallenstein as Engelbert Dollfuss, decorated soldier, reformer and dictator, eventually murdered by those professing loyalty to the higher authority of the Emperor/Hitler) remains open to question, but Weinberger's dedication of the opera to Kurt Schuschnigg, Dollfuss's successor, does not. Neither does the Nazis' construction of Buchenwald on the very site of Wallenstein's camp earlier that year.

In the Schiller anniversary year of 2009, a staged revival in Gera obtained international attention; this one-off concert performance (recorded without applause) hits and misses the mark much like *Wallenstein* itself. The most compelling portrayal comes from Roman Trekel in the title-role, and he does a passable Tauber imitation in the fifth of the opera's six scenes ('Komm an mein Herz') when Weinberger snaps into operetta mode. In the part of the general's daughter Thekla, Martina Welschenbach sings attractively until the part climbs high above the stave, which is often enough to provoke discomfort all round. Dagmar Schellenberger stands out as the scheming Countess Terzky, but too many of the large supporting cast are indistinguishably dry and declamatory where juicier voices are needed. Chorus, orchestra and conductor all deserve credit for bringing conviction and a modicum of coherence to a tricky and intermittently absorbing piece.

Peter Quanttrill

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

BIRGIT NILSSON

Mike Ashman takes stock of the great Swedish soprano's complete recordings for major labels, including the roles that define her legacy



Ticket to immortality: Nilsson's 1960s opera recordings for Decca remain lasting benchmarks

'La Nilsson'

Complete Decca, Philips and DG Recordings

Birgit Nilsson sop

Decca © (79 CDs + 2 DVD) 483 2787

Recorded 1958-82



This anniversary set places under one attractive, inevitably large yet manageably

portable roof all of Birgit Nilsson's major-label recordings (the *Fanciulla del West*, *Turandot* and *Aida* have been borrowed from Warner Classics to join the three companies principally credited). There are also DVDs of the BBC's 1965 *The Golden Ring* and Brian Large's film of her Metropolitan Opera *Elektra* in 1980.

Although Nilsson's reservations about the voice/instrument balances on some of her leading Decca opera sets are now well known, we should remember that the Solti *Ring* and the two Strauss one-acters are quintessential gramophone products of their time, the first golden age of the stereo LP, made by an opera-devoted team of producer/engineers keen to show off their new medium – admittedly being more interventionist than they were later to become – as the message for hearing complete works at home.

This great run of German dramatic opera for the 1960s Decca team will, I suspect, remain Nilsson's ticket to

immortality on disc, whatever the counter-attractions of the live performances coming later in the year from Sony Classical. With this box you can once again set the soprano's Brünnhilde live on Wagner's own stage with an arguably more giving conductor (Böhm) and orchestra alongside the explosive and well-drilled achievements under Solti before the microphones of Vienna's Sofiensaal. Both, I think, are essential in terms of exploring, in tandem, the work and the voice of its leading lady. There's no one way, luckily, and you shouldn't deny yourself – to take just one plum – the push and pull of Nilsson's argument in *Walküre* Act 3 with the veteran Hans Hotter's Wotan just because it is not part of one complete performance.

The 1960s Decca Strauss pair of *Salome* and *Elektra* remain as hot as the day they were first released. The former may be too extreme in terms of intervention from the production desk – especially if you recall that Maria Cebotari (for Clemens Krauss live, various sources) seemed to be able to do a teenager-of-death voice without the colouring of the acoustic around her – but it is a remarkably spooky evocation of the work's atmosphere. And *Elektra* surely remains Nilsson's most compelling single recording, a tour de force of strength on the verge of a nervous breakdown, brilliantly accompanied and supported.

Elsewhere there are treasures that have always been with us thanks to constant

reissues (the Böhm Bayreuth *Tristan*, a performance clearly superior to its earlier Decca rival, also here and reviewed, separately, on page 93) or have been rather forgotten – the Scandinavian song recital that Nilsson herself valued highly. Do try to hear from it Rangström's 'Sköldmön' with its top notes matching 'the Valkyrie' of its title. There's also a kind of 'what Birgit did next' Wagner annexe – most of *Parsifal* Act 2 under Leif Segerstam (the diva rather cautious with colour and expression), the *Wesendonck Lieder* and arias from the early major operas under Colin Davis and a less than thrillingly conducted *Tannhäuser* under Otto Gerdes with the soprano in the double role of Venus and Elisabeth, which apparently she much enjoyed.

Of course, even across a range of material with a consistently high performance standard from its solo star, not even Nilsson can 'do it' every time. Where she wasn't 100 per cent familiar with a character or a work, she could opt on a recording for a more 'old style' neutral presence and profile to match her inevitable vocal security. The *Tosca* disappoints because Nilsson remains a grand prima donna, obviously a relevant attribute but one that, in this case, ignores most of the sensuality and humour that Callas brought to the part. The Webers (*Freischütz* and *Oberon*) – which we tend to think of as trainee Wagner – are exquisitely vocalised but lacking in engagement with her lovers or companions. And it should be noted that the Met *Elektra* film, while certainly important as a souvenir, preserves a voice (but not an actress) that has run its majestic course.

However, the grander Verdis (*Ballo*, *Aida*, *Macbeth*) do come off as convincing music drama rather than a mere *Gastspiel* away from Wagner and Strauss. Her Amelia really suffers in scenes with Giulietta Simionato's Ulrica or Cornell MacNeil's rather bumpy Renato and she certainly fires up Giuseppe Taddei's admirable Macbeth to seek power. A well-rehearsed 1962 Decca recital under Argeo Quadri shouldn't be ignored for its high tension 'Pace, pace, mio Dio' (pity there's no complete Leonora) or 'O don fatale'.

Each recording has its original sleeve artwork. There are no texts or translations, but a good-sized book with recording details (a few errors here) and endearing choice of photos. A fine chance to study a great era of music-making en bloc. **G**

Anita Rachvelishvili

Arakishvili The Legend of Shota Rustaveli – Misi sakheili Tinalin **Bizet** Carmen – L'amour est un oiseau rebelle (Habanera)^a; Près des remparts de Séville (Seguidilla) **Gounod** Sapho – Où suis-je? ... Ô ma lyre immortelle **Mascagni** Cavalleria rusticana – Voi lo sapete, o mamma **Massenet** Werther – Werther ... Je vous écris de ma petite chambre (Letter Aria) **Rimsky-Korsakov** The Tsar's Bride – Lyubasha's Song **Saint-Saëns** Samson et Dalila – Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix; Printemps qui commence **Verdi** Don Carlo – Ah! più non vedrò ... O don fatale; Nei giardin del bello (Veil Song)^b. Il trovatore – Condotta ell'era in ceppi

Anita Rachvelishvili *mez*^b **Barbara Massaro** *sop*
^{ab} **Chorus of the Teatro Municipale, Piacenza;**
RAI National Symphony Orchestra /
Giacomo Sagripanti
 Sony Classical © 19075 80875-2 (43' • DDD)
 Includes texts and translations



Anita Rachvelishvili had the sort of remarkable big break of which

young singers can only dream. Aged 25, a member of the La Scala Academy, she auditioned for the role of Mercédès, impressed Daniel Barenboim enough to offer her the cover as Carmen, then ended up taking on the title-role for Milan's prestigious season-opener. It's become a signature role for her around the world ever since and two of her arias – the Seguidilla and the Habanera – naturally feature on her debut recording. The Georgian has also been adding other powerhouse mezzo roles to her repertoire and several strong characters make up this feisty portrait disc.

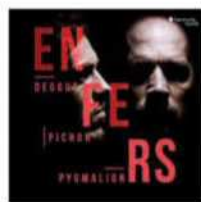
Rachvelishvili's Carmen is not always the most subtle interpretation. Despite an attempt to lighten her voluptuous mezzo in 'Près des remparts de Séville', her gypsy comes across as rather forbidding, someone not to be messed with. There's more seduction to the Habanera. Her Dalila is a temptress, especially the way she can float her high notes, but that formidable chest register needs taming. Among recent roles, Rachvelishvili's Azucena (*Il trovatore*) is superb. Surprisingly, there's no 'Stride la vampa' here, but a searching account of the harrowing narration as the gypsy recounts how her attempt to avenge her mother ended with her throwing her own baby into the flames.

It's good to have some unusual repertoire included. Lyubasha's unaccompanied aria from *The Tsar's Bride* is tenderly sung, and the beautiful cavatina from Dimitri Arakishvili's *The Legend of Shota Rustaveli* is a lovely nod to her native Georgia.

Among future roles, her Eboli could be very exciting. She slips and slides around some of the Veil Song's ornamentation – where many mezzos come a cropper – but she blazes gloriously through 'O don fatale', which closes the disc. I can't wait to hear her sing this on stage. Giacomo Sagripanti and the RAI Orchestra are sympathetic accompanists. **Mark Pullinger**

'Enfers'

Gluck Armide – Nous ne trouvons partout que des gouffres ouverts. Iphigénie en Tauride – Dieux! Protecteurs de ces affreux rivages. Orphée et Eurydice – Ballet des Ombres heureuse; Danse des Furies; Sinfonie infernale **Rameau** Messe de Requiem sur des thèmes de Castor et Pollux. Les Boréades – Entrée de Polymnie. Dardanus – Voici les tristes lieux. Hippolyte et Aricie – Dieux! Que d'infortunés gémissent en ces lieux!; Je ne te verrai plus!; Qu'ai-je appris? Puissant maître des flots; Quelle plainte en ces lieux m'appelle?; Vous, qui de l'avenir percez la nuit profonde ... Quelle soudaine horreur. Les surprises d'Amour – Loure. Zoroastre – Ah! Nos fureurs ne sont point vaines; Air grave pour les Esprits infernaux; Épuisons le flanc des tristes victimes ... Ministres, redoutés du plus puissant empire; Quel bonheur! L'Enfer nous seconde **Rebel** Les éléments – Le cahos **Stéphane Degout** *bar* with **Emmanuelle de Negri** *sop* **Sylvie Brunet-Grupposso** *mez* **Stanislas de Barbeyrac**, **Reinoud Van Mechelen**, **Mathias Vidal** *tens* **Thomas Dolié** *bar* **Nicolas Courjal** *bass* **Pygmalion / Raphaël Pichon**
 Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2282 (78' • DDD)
 Includes texts and translations



My advice to anyone buying this excellent disc is to start by ignoring the contents of the booklet (apart from the texts and translations) and going straight to playing the music. You will then enjoy a fine selection of excerpts from operas by Rameau and Gluck. On turning to the booklet you will get bogged down in the details of a 'Mass for the end of time', the sequence arranged in the form of a Requiem, starting with 'Introit' and concluding with 'Communion & In Paradisum'. The synopsis takes an

imaginary 'Tragedian' down to the Underworld and up to the Elysian Fields. The opera texts and most of the articles are given in translations by the ever-reliable Charles Johnston; but there is one article, whose windy rhetoric – typically French, some might say – is done no favours in a poor translation by another hand.

No: concentrate on the original dramatic situations. The largest element is some 20 minutes of highlights from Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*. In 'Puisque Pluton est inflexible', Theseus begs his (absent) father to release him from the Underworld. Stéphane Degout could make more of the climactic 'Grand dieu', where the orchestra falls silent for a moment. Back in the light of day, Theseus makes a final request to Neptune, Degout's warm baritone beautifully expressing the character's suffering. Sylvie Brunet-Grupposso is powerful in Phaedra's great scene of remorse; and Raphaël Pichon daringly prolongs the silence before the chorus's final 'Hippolyte n'est plus!'.

Degout does rise splendidly to the climax of 'Monstre affreux' from *Dardanus*, after an equally intense – but soft – beginning of the reprise. A sequence from *Zoroastre* introduces Emmanuelle de Negri, who joins Degout in summoning evil spirits. The Pygmalion chorus comes into its own in sections of the Requiem, an anonymous adaptation from *Castor et Pollux*. The last one finds Degout in a rapt account of 'Requiem aeternam', more familiar as the soprano Télière's 'Tristes apprêts'.

The Gluck excerpts include a cough and a spit for Stanislas de Barbeyrac as the Danish knight in *Armide*. In 'Le calme rentre dans mon coeur' from *Iphigénie en Tauride* Pichon under-emphasises the restless figure in the violas that belies Orestes' words. But the three orchestral numbers from *Orphée et Eurydice* are vividly played: stentorian brass for the Furies and a limpid flute in the D minor section of the 'Ballet des Ombres heureuses'. It's back to Rameau for the very end, an exquisite, languorous 'Entrée de Polymnie' from *Les Boréades*. Forget the 'end of time' conceit and marvel at the music, so winningly performed by Pygmalion and Raphaël Pichon.

Richard Lawrence

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Dame Evelyn Glennie
(credit: Jim Callaghan)

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Van Morrison and Joey DeFrancesco

You're Driving Me Crazy

Sony Legacy © 19075820032



'I'm just a guy who sings songs,' Van Morrison insists on 'Goldfish Bowl', a denial of fame and the 'media barons' who foist it on him. The visionary tendencies which marked him as considerably more than a song and dance man have been similarly renounced over the last 20 years, in the studio at least. The jazz strand in his DNA has meanwhile also strengthened. This collaboration with veteran Hammond showman DeFrancesco is his second jazz release in five months. Purists who claim Morrison's no jazz singer because he doesn't improvise new harmonies à la Sarah Vaughan should listen to his muffled

growls on 'Miss Otis Regrets', his scat on 'Close Enough for Jazz' and, especially, his enviable sense of swing and time. His audible pleasure in the company of DeFrancesco's band can leave him relaxed to a fault. There's tough R&B in the style of his previous Hammond partner Georgie Fame, while 'Magic Time' has pockets of stillness which suggests old transports. These, and a craftsman's pleasure in his simplified singing work, will have to do till new visions come along. **Nick Hasted**

Trio HLK

Standard Time

Ubuntu © UBU0006



Standard Time is coded language. The sources for five of the eight pieces on the British ensemble's Ubuntu records debut

are well-known standards, but they are comprehensively dissected and extrapolated in order to lead the listener into 'distant territory by a familiar thread'. Ant Law's eight-string guitar provides dense, often dub-wise bass lines that lend a primal quality in contrast to the finesse of his own soloing as well as that of pianist Harrold and drummer Kass whose dot-dash patterns elide effectively with Evelyn Glennie's vibes and marimba. The presence of American alto saxophonist Steve Lehman, not known for his guest appearances, is also something of a coup, and his work on 'Pains' is a brilliantly calibrated blend of volatility and restraint. A highpoint of the set for its sardonic humour, as well as musical skill, the piece is derived from Chick Corea's 'Spain', whereby a few steps of the unforgettable spiral staircase melody are hardened into a kind of brash syncope-rock rather than swish flamenco. **Kevin Le Gendre**

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SOAR

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Here, at last, is the long-awaited new album from that remarkable duo, the classically trained Welsh harpist Catrin Finch and griot and kora player Seckou Keita. They explore the links between Wales and Senegal in their music and, five years on from *Clychau Dibon* (their gently elegant debut), *SOAR* celebrates another such connection. The osprey spends the winter in West Africa but has begun breeding in mid-Wales for the first time since the early 17th century. The first Welsh-born osprey in recent years to have travelled to Africa and returned to breed in the UK was christened Clarach, which gives the opening track its name, a tranquil piece

that builds into a soaring duet. Then they demonstrate their range. 'Bach to Baïssó' includes an excerpt from the *Goldberg Variations* – surely never played on the kora before – along with an ancient Senegambian tune. '1677' is a brooding, atmospheric piece inspired by memories of French rule in Africa, while 'Cofiwch Drywern' is another lament. It's an exquisite album.

Robin Denselow

Hermanos Herrera

Sones Jarocho y Huastecos y Más

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings © SFW40580



Everybody knows at least one *son jarocho*, even if they don't realise it, and chances are they heard it while trying to discreetly fork a fast-cooling enchilada. But the version of 'La Bamba' by Mexican

American family band, the Hermanos Herrera, might just manage to rescue it. Like the other *jarocho*s and *huastecos* here, it's raw, breathlessly danceable and impassioned in the way authentic roots songs must be. The six siblings – five men, one woman – playing Veracruz harp, double bass and Mexican regional variations of guitar and violin, have been around since the 1990s and play a tight set, harmonising perfectly and hitting the call-and-response falsettos on the infectious 'La Huasanga'. A *ranchera*, 'Anoche estuve llorando' (Last night I was weeping), slows things right down to a sorrowful sway, though the harp continues to tinkle away cherubically.

This is the Hermanos' eighth album and their debut for the excellent Smithsonian Folkways (coming with the usual bilingual booklet). It makes for a fine introduction to a lean, likeable band. **Chris Moss**

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

James Jolly takes us on two listening journeys inspired by a feature and the month

Gains in translation

One of the most convincing cases for a German song to be sung in English is also one of the oldest. On January 10, 1934, the Irish baritone Harry Plunket Greene, aged nearly 70, went into the studio and made a recording for Columbia of **Schubert's** 'Der Leiermann' (the last song in the cycle *Winterreise*); here, 'The Hurdy Gurdy Man'. Words and music are held in extraordinary balance, making for one of the most gripping performances ever recorded. Priceless! Lieder (or mélodie) sung in English was, back in the record industry's early days, far more common than it is today, and there are numerous examples. From towards the end of the 78 era, Kathleen Ferrier made a live recording in English at the Royal Albert Hall of **Brahms's** *Vier ernste Gesänge* in an orchestration by Sir Malcolm Sargent. Rarely has the third song, here 'O death, how bitter thou art', sounded so arresting and laden with emotion. When Benjamin Britten came to record **Bach's** *St John Passion* he opted for a translation made by Imogen Holst and Peter Pears (who sings the role of the Evangelist). Britten responded to the Passion's drama and gives a magnificent performance with some superb soloists (Heather Harper and Alfreda Hodgson on top form). If you crave a modern, historically informed approach to the same work, also in English, consider David Temple and the Crouch End Festival Chorus's Chandos recording with a superb line-up of soloists and, needless to say, choral singing of a very superior order. (Neil Jenkins's fine and communicative version of the text is used and, entrusted to Robert Murray's vivid Evangelist in particular, makes a terrific impact.) Another great choral work is **Brahms's** *Ein deutsches Requiem*. Powerful and moving in its original German, for English speakers the so-called London edition, dispensing with the orchestra and using two pianists in its stead, has comparable power, above all in the movements with baritone soloist (here Marcus Farnsworth). Joseph Fort's recent recording with the Choir of King's College, London and pianists James Baillieu and Richard Uttley makes a very convincing case for the edition. **Haydn's** two oratorios started their life in English as Gottfried van Swieten based his German libretti on English originals. Many people have retro-fitted the pieces – Sir Simon Rattle's version of *The Creation* conveys the work's vitality wonderfully, and his English-speaking soloists convey the narrative with a story-teller's art and immediacy.

Schubert Hurdy Gurdy Man Plunket Greene Symposium
Brahms Four Serious Songs Ferrier; Sargent Decca
Bach St John Passion Britten Decca
Bach St John Passion Temple Chandos
Brahms An English Requiem Fort Delphian
Haydn The Creation Rattle Warner Classics

May, the month when nature bursts into life, launches one of our musical journeys. The other explores German song and choral works in translation, so perhaps the month should be 'Mai'...



The month of May

May should be the month (in the northern hemisphere at least) when spring nudges towards summer, when gardens have regained momentum and everything is bursting into life once more (it takes its name from the goddess of fertility, Maia). For poets, in particular, this resurgence of life reflects an inner blooming, an awakening of love, more often than not. **Robert Schumann's** cycle *Dichterliebe*, setting words by Heine, opens 'In beautiful May, when the buds sprang, love sprang up in my heart'. It's one of his greatest creations and, incidentally, was first heard in England sung by Harry Plunket Greene who opens the playlist opposite. Here, I've chosen our 2016 *Gramophone* Young Artist, Benjamin Appl. Andrea Chénier, in

Act 4 of **Giordano's** opera, awaiting execution in the prison at St Lazare, reflects on the fickleness of life and how, like a day in May, it can be extinguished with a gust of wind. Domingo captures the bitter-sweet mood to perfection. May in Russia sees the cold banished and **Tchaikovsky's** *The Seasons* finds the month in lyrical mood and, in Nikolai Lugansky's Naïve recording, rather dreamy. **Rimsky-Korsakov's** comic opera *May Night*, a love story with a happy, feel-good ending, takes place during a single night. The mood is wonderfully set in the work's Overture, passionate, anticipatory and beautifully scored. Neeme Järvi conducts with his customary style and elegance. **Louis Vierne** is best known as the composer of a vast amount of organ music, but he wrote some charming works for piano too, and his three Nocturnes, Op 34 were written during the winter of 1915-16. The middle piece draws its inspiration from the same Heine poem that opens Schumann's *Dichterliebe* which Vierne encountered in a French translation by Gérard de Nerval. Attractively chromatic, it's a work of delicate beauty, especially as recorded by Olivier Gardon as part of a complete Vierne piano music edition. **John Ireland's** setting for choir (SATB) uses a poem by the 16th-century poet Richard Edwardes, *When May is in his Prime*, that celebrates that vigorous sense of renewal, and Ireland's choral writing is energised and vividly textured. Paul Spicer, a dab hand at this kind of music, draws a fine performance from the Birmingham Conservatoire Chamber Choir.



To explore these playlists via a streaming service, or to create your own, we suggest qobuz.com. You can listen to these particular playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

Schumann *Dichterliebe* Appl; Baillieu Champs Hill
Giordano Andrea Chénier - 'Come un bel di di maggio' Domingo; Milnes RCA
Tchaikovsky *The Seasons* - May Lugansky Naïve
Rimsky-Korsakov *May Night* - Overture RSNO / N Järvi Chandos
Vierne Nocturnes - No 2, 'Au splendide mois de mai' Gardon Timpani
Ireland *When May is in his Prime* Spicer Somm

REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

BOX-SET ROUND-UP PAGE 105

ROB COWAN'S REPLAY PAGE 106

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED PAGE 108

The Mozart and Strauss conductor

Karl Böhm's complete opera recordings have been boxed up by DG – **Hugo Shirley** lends an ear

Compared with DG's recent box of Claudio Abbado's opera recordings, weighing in at 60 CDs (2/18), this Karl Böhm box (also incorporating more general vocal recordings) is a considerably more lavish and bulky affair. Though containing only ten more CDs, it is housed in a grand, handsome square box, its contents – cardboard sleeves recreating original LP issues – arranged in four separate containers around a central gap (it retails for about £225). A luxurious paperback book lays out the details of all the recordings and contains some wonderful photos (those from the sessions of the 1964 *Die Zauberflöte* particularly candid and charming) as well as a characteristically wise and perceptive essay by Richard Osborne.

This essay goes some way to answering the sort of question such a large-scale retrospective issue inevitably raises: what made Böhm special? First, as Christa Ludwig noted, was an understanding of singers, a grounding in detail that allowed him to achieve an unparalleled naturalness in Mozart in particular. ('Sometimes,' writes Osborne in a beautifully evocative phrase, 'all he appeared to do was turn the key and set the engine running.') Böhm's cultural background, meanwhile, allowed him to get to the heart of Berg's two operas. Then there was the friendship with Richard Strauss, which made him such a safe pair of hands – in the best sense – in the composer's well-known works as well as certain rarities, even if he was of a generation that saw no need to restore standard theatrical cuts.

And it's Strauss and Mozart that make up the majority of the box: 50 of the 70 discs, broken down into 28 and 22 respectively. For Strauss, DG has even managed to give us several recordings in addition to those included in the big Strauss box that came out (with the inclusion of libretti, which are not part of the package here) in 1994

to commemorate the Böhm centenary (11/94). There are two additional accounts of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, for example – a work with which Böhm had a particular affinity, as well as an especially long history.

The first is the famous account Böhm conducted as part of Strauss's tense 80th-birthday celebrations in Vienna. The 1944 sound is bearable, the conducting is remarkable, especially, as I noted in my 'Gramophone Collection' on the opera a few years ago (2/14), for its tension and athleticism. And there's some very fine singing from a cast that includes the 24-year-old Irmgard Seefried. From 25 years later we have the studio recording with the Bavarian RSO that for so long languished outside of the catalogue, worth hearing primarily for Tatyana Troyanos's wonderful Composer (Hildegard Hillebrecht's *Ariadne* is a tad provincial, alas) and for conducting that has hints of what would help make Böhm's 1979 live Vienna recording of the work my top choice in that Collection. In between, the 1954 Salzburg Festival account headed by Lisa Della Casa and Rudolf Schock remains well worth hearing.

In addition to the live 1969 *Rosenkavalier* (with Christa Ludwig's Marschallin better represented than with Bernstein in the studio), we now also have the 1958 studio set from Dresden that was briefly reissued on DG Originals. It's a recording that never really established itself against Karajan's famous 1956 EMI set, but which increasingly seems to serve as an admirably honest, straightforward complement (or even antidote?) to the Karajan's micromanaged perfectionism. The 1960 *Elektra*, with Inge Borkh wonderfully rounded in the title role, is similarly a more human complement to the famous Solti recording from later in the decade, although it does have the disadvantage of being cut.

The 1971 *Capriccio* is arguably better than its (significantly earlier) classic EMI

counterpart under Wolfgang Sawallisch, and boasts Gundula Janowitz, among a cast awash with top names, as a Countess of unparalleled serenity and loveliness. The 1970 *Salome* is more difficult to recommend, somewhat inconsistently recorded and with a cast headed by Gwyneth Jones's vocally idiosyncratic Judaeen princess and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau not quite knowing, it seems, what to make of Jochanaan, either vocally or dramatically.

Böhm's Mozart is certainly on the stately side, but it is always beautifully sprung and pointed

We're on safer ground with more live sets. The 1977 Vienna *Frau ohne Schatten* showcases the powerhouse quartet – Leonie Rysanek, Brigit Nilsson, James King and Walter Berry – that with Böhm did so much to bring the work to the world's attention. But three of them, with Christa Ludwig instead of Nilsson as the Dyer's Wife (the former retired the role as the latter added it to her repertoire), had created an astonishing performance in New York 11 years earlier – reissued as part of the Metropolitan Opera's box of first nights from its inaugural season (3/17) – and that's probably preferable. And don't expect to find the pioneering 1955 studio recording, also with Rysanek, which was always a Decca set.

The 1947 *Arabella* – with Della Casa's breakthrough performance as Zdenka – is deeply rewarding, despite the sound obviously leaving something to be desired. Finally, two real classics: the 1959 Salzburg *Schweigsame Frau* and the 1964 Vienna *Daphne*. The former features Hans Hotter's Sir Morosus, Hilde Guden as Aminta and Fritz Wunderlich as Henry; the latter has Guden and Fritz Wunderlich again.



Stewart's characteristically classy Dutchman.

Jones leads the cast in the fine, robust 1969 *Fidelio* from Dresden, and it's interesting to have two contrasting versions of the *Missa solemnis*. In Berlin in 1955, the conductor is let down by some pretty rickety solo singing; the cast of the 1974 Vienna remake – Margaret Price, Ludwig, Wiesław Ochman and Talvela – offer something rather more robust and, in the case of the women, a lot more than that.

Berg is represented by the first studio recording of *Wozzeck*, recorded in 1965 with Fischer-Dieskau perhaps not ideally suited to the put-upon everyman, despite all the intelligence he displays. Böhm's conducting is unfailingly authoritative here, though, as well as in the live *Lulu* dating from two years later – sharing three principals with the earlier

Karl Böhm with the mezzo Christa Ludwig – heard together in the DG set in Beethoven, Brahms, Richard Strauss and Wagner

Both are unsurpassed. And mention of those last names offers a chance to focus on the quality of the singers Böhm worked with, with many of his regular 'ensemble' featuring in the Mozart recordings that take up most of the rest of the box: a mixture of classic sets (previously canonised in the Originals series) and others that have slipped out of the limelight.

We have Fischer-Dieskau as Papageno, Don Giovanni and the Count; Janowitz as the Countess and (live from Salzburg opposite Brigitte Fassbaender in 1974) Fiordiligi. And then there's Wunderlich's unparalleled Tamino on the 1964 *Zauberflöte*, which offers luxury casting in the men in the way that Klemperer's 1966 EMI set did with the women: beside Fischer-Dieskau, Wunderlich and Franz Crass's gloriously steady and noble Sarastro, there's Hotter's authoritative Speaker and James King and Martti Talvela as the sort of Armed Men you'd happily have in charge of your security.

You might not find yourself enjoying all the performances on the 1967 *Don Giovanni* from Prague, but the sheer vocal firepower offers a special thrill: as well as Fischer-Dieskau and Talvela as Giovanni and the Commendatore, the line-up includes such singers as Nilsson, Martina Arroyo, Reri Grist, Peter Schreier and Ezio Flagello (an especially delightful Leporello). By modern standards Böhm's Mozart is certainly on the stately side, but it is always beautifully sprung and pointed,



as one also hears in the 1977 *Idomeneo*, 1973 *Entführung* (dialogue alas taken by actors), and 1979 *Clemenza* – all from Dresden. Only the late live *Don Giovanni* from Salzburg in 1977 really feels a little too sedate, especially in the Supper Scene.

In his essay, Osborne points to Böhm's preference for live recording, and two live Wagner sets from Bayreuth included (his *Ring*, which tended more often to crop up under the Philips imprimatur, is left out) certainly show the conductor as his fieriest. The fleet and impassioned 1966 *Tristan* – with Birgit Nilsson on fearsome form – is always worth revisiting, but the 1971 *Holländer* is thrillingly conducted and played, too, with Gwyneth Jones's gale-force Senta opposite Thomas

work – but there the orchestral playing is not always up to scratch and it is, of course, a recording without the Cerha completion (or any other completion, for that matter).

Additional goodies include a period piece in the form of 1960 highlights from Handel's *Giulio Cesare* (with Seefried and Fischer-Dieskau) and two fabulous excerpts from a 1972 Met Gala for Rudolf Bing. Teresa Żylis-Gara and Franco Corelli sing the Act 1 duet from *Otello*, and Nilsson is on incandescent form in the final scene from *Salome*. And I've not mentioned the 1967 Vienna Symphony Orchestra *Jahreszeiten*, with a radiant Janowitz joined by Schreier and Talvela, the Fischer-Dieskau *Kindertotenlieder* and *Rückert Lieder*, a wonderful 1976 Brahms *Alto Rhapsody* with Ludwig, and a grand, imposing 1971 Mozart Requiem. Some interesting spoken interview material in German is also included as a bonus.

Dipping into this box, one comes away with a renewed admiration for Böhm and what he stood for: the musical integrity; unrushed tempos and sonic grandeur that never teetered over into the glacial or overly monumental; the ability to bring out the best in the very finest singers. DG's handsome box does him and that achievement proud.

THE RECORDINGS

Karl Böhm: The Operas

Various artists / Böhm

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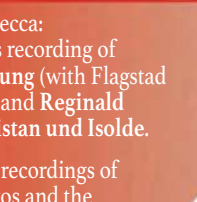


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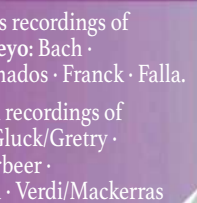


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BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan on a quartet of CD boxes ranging from Telemann to Leopold Stokowski

Back in our December 1973 issue Max Harrison observed that 'Jascha Heifetz's performances of Bach's works for unaccompanied violin [are] practically as good as the music itself, and such life, such unfailing vividness, must always be rare'. As it happens I agree with him entirely and would extend parallel plaudits to embrace the Juilliard Quartet's **Complete Epic Recordings** of Mozart's six 'Haydn' Quartets, which promote a level of finely tooled beauty that recalls similar qualities in Heifetz's Bach. You need only sample the *Dissonance* Quartet's fragile opening to hear what I mean. Sony Classical's collection of these benchmark recordings includes equally remarkable accounts of Haydn's three Op 54 Quartets, Beethoven's 'middle' quartets (including the *Harp*) that anticipate the Emerson Quartet in energy and attack, elfin Mendelssohn and perhaps most remarkable of all, late Schubert, the G major inhabiting a shimmering, glacial world that takes us beyond the close of *Winterreise* to Bruckner's Eighth, even side-tracking forwards to Webern. This was ever the vintage Juilliard's skill, to make the old sound new and the new sound strangely familiar, as is apparent in their versions of accessible, well-written Quartets by Benjamin Lees and William Denny.

The **Emerson Quartet** is probably closer in playing style to the Epic Juilliards than even the Juilliards themselves have been in later years. Both groups prioritise clean lines, spot-on rhythmic projection, intellectual rigour and an overall interpretative intelligence that mark them out as way above the norm. DG's collection starts, chronologically, with Bach (*The Art of Fugue* and music from the '48') and includes the Emerson's decidedly 'Juilliardian' Bartók quartet set as well as the complete quartet cycles of Beethoven, Mendelssohn and most exceptionally, Shostakovich – the Ninth Quartet being an especially good sampling point. Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets (all six are included) don't inspire quite the degree of awe that the vintage Juilliards do, while in comparison with the snowbound Juilliards the Emerson's Schubert G major seems to have experienced something of a springtime



thaw. Ives and Barber quartets are wholly memorable, so are eight Haydn quartets (plus the *Seven Last Words*) and numerous other works including quartets and quintets with the pianist Menahem Pressler, the whole set amounting to a generous introduction for anyone contemplating a journey through the quartet repertoire. The playing is invariably fabulous.

The vintage Juilliard's skill was to make the old sound new and the new sound strangely familiar

And what of Leopold Stokowski's Decca Phase Four Debussy, his *La mer* in particular? Plush, strikingly stereophonic, dramatic as well as lavishly drawn and personality-driven, a widescreen affair to say the least, as is virtually everything else in **Leopold Stokowski: Complete Decca Recordings**, with a Norman Luboff Choir RCA Living Stereo programme added. But while Stokowski's magnificent pre-war Philadelphia legacy has us stunned from a respectful 'mono' distance, these sonically exaggerated twin-channel productions can tire the ear rather quickly. Among the set's highlights is a refreshingly direct Beethoven *Choral* (Symphonies Nos 5 and 7, although broadly paced, are similarly uncompromising), a massive Franck D minor (from Hilversum), robust *Messiah* extracts, youthfully ardent accounts of Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and Elgar's *Enigma* Variations (both with the Czech Philharmonic) while in the *Symphonie fantastique* and *Scheherazade*, applied rouge is rather too conspicuous: witness Rimsky's significantly tarted-up *Capriccio espagnole*. Which happens quite often throughout the set, though there's plenty to admire and it's humbling to think that an octogenarian or even nonagenarian Stokowski was moulding the notes. Nothing here quite compares

with the *Tristan*/Philadelphia synthesis on Sony (whose Stokowski stereo collection would be my first port of call), but there's more than enough to stimulate the ear, not least Messiaen's *L'Ascension*, magisterially orchestrated Bach, and a persuasive sound documentary created by Jon Tolansky, which features some refreshingly candid interview material. On this evidence Stokowski was certainly no saint!

Georg Philipp Telemann would have gained little if anything from Stokowski's added colouring. He did it all himself. I'd say that among the highlights of Harmonia Mundi's beautifully produced seven-CD **Telemann Companion** are the three discs devoted to the startlingly original orchestral suites. Try the Overture *La Bizarre*, aptly titled, given its bizarrely twisting modulations, or the closing 'Rossignol' flapping away at speed. The dramatic Overture 'for a joint tragi-comic Suite' strikes an even more dazzling note, as does the 'Hornpipe-Sarabande-La Suave', or the hoot of a 'Canarie' that closes the C major *Water Music* Suite. All this and more is played with style and gusto by Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, which also performs on the frequently beautiful *Brockes Passion* and *Orpheus*, where René Jacobs conducts with a cast including Dorothea Röschmann and Werner Güra. This is music of rare quality and Harmonia Mundi has provided us with a neat Telemann starter pack. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Juilliard String Quartet: The Complete Epic Recordings 1956-66

Sony Classical © ① 8898-547013-2

Emerson String Quartet: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon
DG © (52 discs) 479 598-2

Leopold Stokowski: The Complete Decca Recordings

Decca © (23 discs) 483 250-4

Telemann Companion

Harmonia Mundi © ① HMX290 8781/7

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



The art of Alfredo Campoli

Over the years I'm more than grateful for the chance to revisit recordings that previously I'd either overlooked or undervalued, and my sincere thanks go to the Australian Eloquence label for offering me new-found access to the wonderful Decca legacy of Alfredo Campoli (1906-91) – although in the case of **'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 5**, Elgar's Violin Concerto with the LPO under Sir Adrian Boult has always struck me as ideal, both in terms of Campoli's emotional commitment to the work and Boult's mastery of the score. They achieve a comprehensive overview of an absolute masterpiece. In fact, after listening to this fresh new transfer I think that maybe this is the version to have, Campoli digging in ever deeper as the work progresses. The Bliss Concerto, a sort of Elgar-Walton synthesis with its own distinct voice, and the even more Waltonian *Theme and Cadenza*, both expertly conducted by the composer, fill the second disc, whereas the Elgar is tailed by a chipper stereo recording of Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* and a performance that owes not a little to Heifetz's influence (as far as I can judge, the only performance in the series that does).

But to start at the beginning, **'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 1** treats us to the earliest recording in the sequence, a deliberate, strongly projected account of Bach's D minor Partita, in which Campoli, having for so many years happily indulged the lighter end of the musical spectrum, presents himself as a deeply serious if romantic interpreter of the Baroque repertory's greatest solo violin work. The Tartini and Handel sonatas with George Malcolm (piano in the former, harpsichord in the latter) are above all lyrically phrased and intensely human, eschewing even the tiniest whiff of applied scholarship, much in the manner of Menuhin's, Heifetz's and Elman's performances of Baroque music,



Alfred Campoli, a gentleman fiddler, is magnificent in Elgar's Concerto

though Campoli's approach is rather less intense than theirs.

'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 2 is consistently glorious, especially the two versions of the mature Mendelssohn Concerto, the first under Eduard van Beinum, the second (and marginally superior of the two, in stereo) under Boult. Here Campoli and his collaborators judge to perfection the work's combination of fantastical charm and classical backbone. The Beethoven Concerto with the LSO under Josef Krips includes a magnificent reading of Kreisler's first-movement cadenza and a performance of the *Larghetto* in which Campoli's faultless intonation will likely leave you breathless. And there's Bruch's G minor Concerto with the New Symphony Orchestra under Royaltan Kisch, like a musical bear hug, with

an account of the *Adagio* that positively glows. I don't think I've ever heard a more moving recorded account of this lovable perennial.

'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 3 is the first and earlier of two devoted to encores, Fritz Kreisler being the principal draw, either as composer or arranger, Eric Gritton proving a supremely stylish accompanist. The beauty here is that Campoli manages to suggest Kreislerian geniality without attempting to mimic Kreisler himself: his vibrato is wider than was Kreisler's, his approach generally more laid-back, though where fireworks are called for his technical mastery is never beyond doubt. **'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 6** (with sympathetic pianists Daphne Ibbott and Norihiko Wada) is another encores disc, taking us to stereo sound and the autumn of Campoli's recording career. It's remarkable playing when you consider that at the time he was around 70, though it would be idle to pretend that his playing here is quite on a par with the best recordings from the 1950s.

And lastly, **'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 4** is of historic interest in that

Campoli opts to perform August Wilhelmj's edition of the Tchaikovsky Concerto, 'with its haphazard excisions and fitfully revised solo line', as I observed when reviewing the Beulah reissue (9/95). Bronisław Huberman in his recording of the Tchaikovsky was described as 'inclined to hardness in his gaieties' (11/29), and in some respects Campoli opts for a similar approach, at least in the first movement, though the edition of the score Huberman uses is more in line with Tchaikovsky's own. What really grabbed me at the start of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* was the level of command from the rostrum, having not previously logged that van Beinum is in charge. From a musical point of view (with the Lalo and the Tchaikovsky respectively), Ataúlfo Argenta and van Beinum more or

less steal the show. The same set includes Saint-Saëns's Third Concerto elegantly played under Anatole Fistoulari, plus various shorter works in neatly tailored performances that invariably wear a winning smile.

Campoli, like Kreisler, was a gentleman fiddler whose playing combines honesty, urbanity and unexpected bursts of brilliance. I'd thoroughly recommend these superbly remastered recordings to anyone who cares about quality violin playing. Expert annotation is provided by Campoli's biographer David Tunley.

THE RECORDINGS



'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 1

Bach, Tartini, Handel
Campoli *vn* Malcolm *pf* & *hpd*
Decca Eloquence ⓑ ②
482 5175



'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 2

Mendelssohn, Bruch, Beethoven
Campoli *vn* LPO, LSO et al
Decca Eloquence ⓑ ②
482 5171



'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 3

Violin Encores
Campoli *vn* Gritton/Malcolm *pf*
Decca Eloquence ⓑ ②
482 5159



'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 4

Tchaikovsky, Lalo, Sarasate et al
Campoli *vn* LSO / Argenta et al
Decca Eloquence ⓑ ②
482 5151



'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 5

Elgar, Bruch, Bliss
Campoli *vn* LPO / Boult; Bliss
Decca Eloquence ⓑ ②
482 5143



'The Bel Canto Violin', Vol 6

Sarasate, Wieniawski, Bach et al
Campoli *vn* Ibbott/Wada *pf*
Decca Eloquence ⓑ ②
482 5135

Danish violin wizard

'The most popular Danish violinist ever' is how Danacord touts Wandy Tworek (1913-90), born in Copenhagen to a Polish father and a Ukrainian mother, who were both musically gifted. Wandy later formed his own orchestra, performed with the likes of Victor Borge and made some interesting and sometimes memorable records. As to sampling, I'd fly straight to the end of the second CD for two hilarious items, Poliakin's *Le canari* and Mortensen's *Cock's Doodle-Andy* (especially), where Tworek's ability to make his instrument transcend its apparent tonal limitations is remarkable. These are genuine party pieces. In fact,

all the shorter items are a joy, especially Hubay's Csárdás No 5 and a version of Gade's tango *Jalousie* (under Emil Reesen) that just about pips everyone else's to the post, including Arthur Fiedler's. And then there are the bigger works, a lyrically stated *Devil's Trill* Sonata (where the trills are indeed devilishly well handled), Franck's A major Sonata, where Tworek spins a seductively sweet line, Wieniawski's Concerto No 2 (pleasing rather than exceptional) and Bartók's Solo Sonata with an emotionally charged account of the central Melodia. The transfers more than pass muster and this collection should give much pleasure to fiddle aficionados.

THE RECORDING



'The Danish Violin Wizard'

Wieniawski, Bartók, Tartini et al
Tworek *vn* Danish Broadcasting
Orchestra / Tuxen et al
Danacord Ⓜ ② DACOCD 787-788

Great violinists on show

VAI's two DVDs make for pleasurable viewing, with some players appearing on both and generally acceptable picture and sound quality. The 'old world' is vividly represented by Mischa Elman playing *Schön Rosmarin* with an implied chuckle and Michael Rabin looking rather pleased with himself having dispatched a brilliant *Tambourin chinois* (both Vol 1). What a joy to see Joseph Szigeti in 1954 playing Hubay's Csárdás No 3 with a telling combination of panache and gypsy-style ardour (Vol 2). It's a pity that Ida Haendel's lusty account of the finale from Brahms's Concerto is so rigidly accompanied under Franz-Paul Decker (Vol 1), also that on Vol 2 all we have from her of Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* is the introduction. David Oistrakh plays the first movement of Brahms's D minor Sonata with Sviatoslav Richter (Vol 1), our eyes and ears inevitably drawn to Richter's powerfully focused piano playing; Oistrakh is marginally warmer (and younger) in the first movement of Beethoven's C minor Sonata (Vol 2). Two virtuosic highlights are on Vol 2: Ruggiero Ricci (1964) in the finale of Tchaikovsky's Concerto; and Zino Francescatti (1959) with great warmth and lightning inflections in *Zigeunerweisen*. Isaac Stern combines heart and hardiness in Brahms's *F-A-E* Scherzo (Vol 2) and with Leonard Rose and Eugene Istomin gives a thrilling account of the finale from Beethoven's Op 1 No 3 (Vol 1). Also represented are Henryk Szeryng, the Guarneri Quartet, Aaron Rosand, Josef Suk, Nathan Milstein, Yehudi Menuhin and Christian Ferras. Given the choice, I'd opt for the marginally more compelling Vol 2.

THE RECORDINGS



'Virtuoso Violinists', Vol 1

Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Kreisler,
Mendelssohn, Paganini
Oistrakh, Milstein, Ferras et al *vn*
VAI Ⓢ DVD 4595



'Virtuoso Violinists', Vol 2

Beethoven, Brahms, Franck,
Janáček, Tchaikovsky et al
Haendel, Szeryng, Stern et al *vn*
VAI Ⓢ DVD 4598

Vintage quartet treasures

No sooner had I been feasting on Sony Classical's box of Juilliard Quartet recordings (see page 105) than a very different, but hardly less beguiling, Scribendum set devoted to the Vienna Konzerthaus Quartet recordings from the early 1950s made a somewhat belated appearance. A separate world that's for sure, though equally valid, the Juilliard's cut-glass precision and exquisite nuancing quite different from the more *gemütlich* manner of the Vienna group, most noticeable in Mozart's great D minor Quartet, K421, where the Americans' approach is tense, pensive, even dark in its vaguely ominous implications, whereas the Austrians opt for a sombre sweetness, their tone throughout far more mellow, with portamentos as part of the stylistic mix. Similarly in the case of the finale of Schubert's D887 in G: the contrast between power walking (Juilliard) and gentle jogging (Vienna Konzerthaus). Beethoven is treated to weighty, unhurried accounts of the three 'Rasumovsky' Quartets, the *Harp* and Opp 127 and 132, fine readings though less inwardly probing than, say, the Busch Quartet (Warner). We're given two complete sets of Haydn quartets (Opp 64 and 76), and it's fascinating to compare these recordings with a couple of the works (Op 64 No 2 and Op 76 No 1) included in Preiser's 12-CD Haydn quartet survey by the Vienna Konzerthaus, the versions featured here more upfront and robust, the Preiser ones more intimate and subtly expressive. That said, this version of Op 76 No 5's slow movement is rapturously beautiful. We're given the complete Schubert quartets plus a glorious account of the String Quintet. The transfers are in the main first-rate.

THE RECORDING



'The Art of Vienna'

Konzerthaus Quartet
Scribendum Ⓢ (22 discs)
SC804

Classics RECONSIDERED



Patrick Rucker and Harriet Smith remove their rose-tinted spectacles to take a timely fresh look at Ivo Pogorelich's 1983 DG recording of Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*



Ravel

Gaspard de la nuit

Ivo Pogorelich *pf*

DG

Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*, even the final 'Scarbo', involves a less acrid wizardry than Prokofiev's concluding *Vivace* [in his Piano Sonata No 6, coupled with the Ravel], and in Vladimir Ashkenazy's 'Ondine', on Decca, one admires, indeed, the remote, poetic quality of his interpretation. Here Pogorelich plays with delicate intensity, the

two pages or so which lead to the *très lent* having an extraordinary becalmed sadness. Something altogether darker is evident amid the frozen immobility of his 'Le gibet', where everything is seen in disquieting half-lights. Both Ousset, on HMV, and Ashkenazy are magnificent amid the tumult of 'Scarbo', although the former's reading is the more external, more on the surface.

Pogorelich's view is more haunted, has a greater nervous intensity from the start and, as at some points in the Prokofiev,

he penetrates to remoter strata of feeling than his rivals. As usual, I find the DG recorded sound rather cool; that is not inappropriate to this music, yet I prefer the general ambience of the other discs mentioned here. There is no doubt, however, that this is the most satisfying LP Pogorelich has made so far, capturing much of the authentic magic of his unforgettable performances of these two works at the Barbican Centre, London, last September. **Max Harrison (6/83)**

Patrick Rucker In becoming reacquainted with Ivo Pogorelich's now 35-year-old recording of *Gaspard de la nuit*, a couple of things occurred to me. I have no actual data, but I wager that the piece figures in more pianists' repertoires than it did in 1983. One current catalogue I checked lists 136 recordings by 99 pianists, nine of them by Martha Argerich alone. Of course, *Gaspard* has always had its champions – Monique Haas, Vlado Perlemuter, Samson François, Marcelle Meyer and even Walter Gieseking come to mind. But nowadays it almost seems that we have a new *Gaspard* every few months or so. This is, of course, an exaggeration, but I think if Pogorelich's recording were released today it would face much stiffer competition than it did 35 years ago. What's your sense of it, Harriet?

Harriet Smith That's a very good point: after all, Max Harrison had as his comparisons Vladimir Ashkenazy and Cécile Ousset, neither an artist I'd exactly have at the top of my *Gaspard* list. But not only are we getting far more recordings of *Gaspard*, but quite often the finest – from Bertrand Chamayou, Steven Osborne, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet – are placed within

the context of a complete solo Ravel, which immediately gives the artist a greater insight into how this work fits within the output of this extraordinarily complex genius – rather than said artist taking at face value Ravel's quip about wanting to outdo the difficulty of Balakirev's *Islamey*. With Pogorelich, there's a tension between the extraordinary – for example, the way he articulates the demisemiquavers between the hands in 'Ondine' at 1'30" (bar 24), or the deliquescent effects from 4'52" in the same movement – and the sense at other points that he's being wilful just for the hell of it.

PR I agree. The tension you describe is often a factor in Pogorelich's performances, but it's particularly pronounced in this *Gaspard*. There is also a focus on detail here that I think robs the individual movements of some of their potential cohesion and impact. Of the three, 'Le gibet' seems most successful to me, achieving an almost Grand Guignol sense of desolation and horror. One can almost see the desiccated corpse slowly twisting at the end of the rope, and the incessantly tolling bell couldn't be creepier. But even here, odd details obtrude. The decision to punch the E flat octave pedal point at 2'11" (bar 17)

and the B flat octave at around 5'03" (bar 43) ignores Ravel's dynamic indications and disrupts the atmosphere otherwise so skilfully achieved.

HS I agree about the detail at the expense of the overall picture – Pogorelich once contentiously claimed that critics were so used to hearing sloppy, inaccurate performances that we mistook his fidelity to the score as mere idiosyncrasy! Things such as the slight pause at around 1'23" in 'Le gibet' or the way he plays its grace notes rather ponderously (at around 3'47" and 4'13") disrupt the sense of movement. But – and this is the joy of the art of criticism – what *you* find to be an air of desolation and horror *I* fail to hear. I'm missing the obsessive tolling quality precisely because Pogorelich is messing around with the details too much. Of course, we can talk endlessly about how much fidelity to the score is needed for a performance to be successful – Argerich can play fast and loose with it, as we know, but she is never less than mesmerising.

PR Of course, nowadays 'Scarbo' is enshrined as one of the most difficult pieces written for the instrument, and rightly so.



Ivo Pogorelich's DG recording of *Gaspard de la nuit* is 'shot through with moments of genius'

Despite all its demands in terms of speed and agility, the awkward passagework and, let's not forget, those extended repeated notes, I think the piece's greatest challenge is the extreme dynamics it requires, particularly at the very, very quiet end of the spectrum. Ravel asks for a clear distinction between *ppp* and *pp*, and producing that distinction audibly is key to 'Scarbo's' impact. If they're insufficiently soft, then the loudest end of the dynamic spectrum will be stridently off the charts. So, even though the subtlest beauty of sound may seem like a paradoxical concept in a piece depicting a demon darting about in your bedroom, I think it plays a role. Pogorelich's 'Scarbo' is imbued with an almost overwhelming nervous energy that's both magnificent and compelling. It's truly awesome. What I miss is the dimension – attained only by the utmost subtlety and finesse of detail against a backdrop of still and quiet – that somehow suggests to the listener that they ask, 'Is this real, or am I dreaming?' I'm reminded of two other performances: Yuja Wang's dazzlingly rhythmical one from the Verbier Festival on YouTube, and Chamayou's magisterial reading on his set of complete

Ravel (3/16). In their very different ways, these two artists seem to explore fully that elusive dimension, elevating 'Scarbo' from jaw-dropping virtuosity to the realm of protean musical imagination in full flight. Rather than insist, they suggest. And the evocative imagery is hair-raising. Am I making any sense?

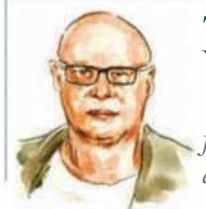
HS Just looking at the score of this last movement leaves me needing a lie-down – it's so preposterously demanding. And you can't but be awestruck by the sheer technique Pogorelich displays here – those repeated notes, at whatever dynamic, sound almost embarrassingly easy in his hands. Is it that ease that's the problem for me in this performance? Sometimes I think that 'Scarbo' does need to sound on the edge of what is possible, as if the pianist has had to do battle to master it. Yet listening to Wang – thanks for that tip-off, I hadn't heard that performance, and it's staggeringly potent – I realise that it's not simply down to whether it sounds hard or not. I think the problem with Pogorelich is that he makes it sound too much like an *étude*. Ironically, the result (to these ears) is somewhat lacking in

drama – a truly sharply etched characterisation. Perhaps it's just that I like my shape-shifting gnome to be more sinister? I fear I come away from the Pogorelich account just remembering details of how well he plays this bit or that without a sense of the movement as a whole. And the ending is somehow slightly underwhelming – it's too corporeal, not vanishing quite fast enough.

PR So I suppose it would be fair to say that were Pogorelich's *Gaspard* released today it most probably wouldn't be accorded the status it once enjoyed at a time when the market wasn't quite so crowded with superlative readings. Which of course raises an interesting question: in the broadest international terms, has the general level of piano playing risen? I believe it has, though I'd be hard pressed to say precisely why. Surely the international competition circuit – whose deleterious influence on young musicians it used to be reflexive to decry – has played a role. Another factor may be that nowadays we all have relatively easy access to more than a century's worth of historical piano playing through recordings. And I believe that the levels of piano pedagogy have improved. Even now, learning the piano is still not so far from a medieval apprenticeship: the young musician attaches themselves to one or more master teachers for intensive one-to-one tutelage over a period of years. But I think that the psychological sophistication with which the best teachers train their students is significantly greater than it was, say, 50 years ago. They're less tyrannical with their pupils, and perhaps less possessive. I don't know, I may be out on a limb here. But it does seem to me that there's a lot of very good piano playing going on today.

HS Ah yes, the medieval apprenticeship: what an apt analogy! I like to think that if the Pogorelich *Gaspard* were newly issued now it would be seen for what I think it is – an idiosyncratic performance, flawed but shot through with moments of genius. But, of course, people like an eccentric (which is surely what he is) – from Gould to Cziffra – so he'd probably always have a following. And certainly there are more pianists around today who can play *Gaspard* fabulously – we haven't even mentioned Benjamin Grosvenor, who's currently revisiting the piece in the concert hall. But I still think that the number of pianists absolutely at the top is a very small one – on my desert island would be Osborne, Arcadi Volodos, Igor Levit and Leif Ove Andsnes. But were Pogorelich to show up, I'm afraid I'd be inclined to push him into the waves. **G**

Books



Tim Ashley welcomes Stephen Walsh's study of Debussy:

'Walsh portrays Debussy's transformation from a surly, uncommunicative child into an adult often in thrall to his libido'



Geraint Lewis reads an affectionate tribute to the tenor Wilfred Brown:

'Given Brown's inherent spirituality and love of languages these specific fields proved the perfect path for a singer of innate sensitivity'

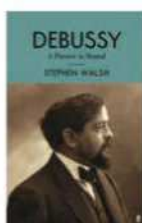
Debussy

A Painter in Sound

By Stephen Walsh

Faber & Faber, HB, 368pp, £20

ISBN 978-0-5713-3016-4



'A biography of sorts' is how Stephen Walsh describes his fine new study of Debussy.

His primary aim is 'to treat Debussy's music as the crucial expression of his intellectual life', and the book is not so much a conventional life-and-works as an examination of his artistic development in the context of the circumstances, cultural and personal, that shaped it. Above all, it is a portrait of a rebel, whose redrafting of the parameters of harmony, sonority and rhythm, in ways he considered to be quintessentially French, irrevocably changed perceptions of music itself.

Walsh traces how Debussy's work was forged in reaction to the academic traditions, rooted in the study of Viennese classics and Czerny's piano method, of the Paris Conservatoire and French Academy in Rome, which in turn fostered his lifelong distrust of Austro-German trends in French music. Other influences, however, inevitably came into play. As a teenager, he was an avid reader of contemporary poetry, and his association of music with the literary and pictorial was formed early. So, too, was the equation of the creative with the sensual through his affair with the married and vocally gifted Blanche Vasnier. The songs he wrote for her have only recently come to prominence, and Walsh's examination of how he began to find his own voice through hers is one of the book's significant achievements.

Another is Walsh's discussion of Debussy's complex relationships with the Symbolist and Impressionist movements with which his name is linked, whether he wished it or not. His ties to the Symbolists were close. Mallarmé, Maeterlinck and D'Annunzio were among his associates and

collaborators. He also based a considerable body of work on acknowledged precursors such as Baudelaire, Poe (the unfinished *La chute de la maison Usher*) and the Pre-Raphaelites (*La damoiselle élue*). Yet one also senses ambivalence, since the movement from Baudelaire onwards was saturated with Wagnerism, which he profoundly distrusted, and in the key Symbolist works of the early 1890s its legacy had to be both transformed and rejected. *Pelléas* is haunted by *Tristan*, even as it struggles to forge a new vocal and orchestral language in opposition to it. In *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, written contemporaneously, Debussy breaks free and the mature composer finally emerges.

The 'Impressionist' tag was first flung at him pejoratively by the Academy assessors in response to *Printemps*, one of his Prix de Rome *envois*. Its use rankled, though it is, of course, by no means inappropriate. Impressionist painting, with its rapid attempts to capture the light of the individual moment, may have squared uneasily with Debussy's compositional fastidiousness, but it also constituted an attack on formal academic values similar to his own. Debussy described *Nuages* as 'what in painting would be a study in grey', which immediately recalls Whistler, from whose comparable studies in colour he probably took the title *Nocturnes*. Walsh compares *Fêtes* with Pissarro's *The Boulevard Montmartre at Night*, and argues that Monet's *Storm, off the Coast of Belle-Île* is organised 'partly, of course, by a deliberate limitation of motive, but within that by a big colour variation within a narrow range of tones', which in turn corresponds to Debussy's methodology in *La mer*.

Walsh never neglects the man, though, and is often wonderfully acute in portraying his transformation from a surly, uncommunicative child into an adult who was often in thrall to his libido, and who could be remote and tetchy, even with those he loved most. 'I have never been able to live in the reality of things and people', Debussy wrote, 'from which

comes this invincible need to escape into myself, into experiences that seem inexplicable because I reveal there a person nobody knows, and which is perhaps the best of me!' It's no wonder the women in his life found him difficult. 'I don't know how I will manage not to go on resenting your music', his second wife Emma told him.

Walsh writes beautifully throughout, often with perceptive irony and wit, though it is his descriptions of the music itself that perhaps give the greatest pleasure. He's particularly wonderful on the songs, where little phrases linger in your memory, such as 'the dark, crablike ostinato' which underpins 'La grotte', in the *Trois Chansons de France*, and which later formed the unforgettable motto of *Des pas sur la neige*. Walsh's analyses are sometimes challenging but always perceptive: he cares less for the orchestral *Images* than some, and I would have liked more from him on the second set of *Préludes*. But, above all, this is a book that sends you back to the music itself to listen afresh and marvel at its greatness.

Do read it. **Tim Ashley**

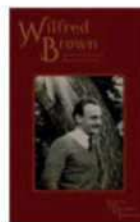
Wilfred Brown

At the Crossroads of Human Experience

By Stephen Duncan Johnston

EM Publishing, HB, 318pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-9572-9422-6



Wilfred Brown gave his first performance of Gerald Finzi's *Dies natalis* in Cambridge on May 1, 1948,

when he was still, technically, an amateur singer. He sang it at his last public appearance, in Highclere Castle on December 22, 1970, when he was mortally ill. And on September 27-28, 1963, he made the celebrated recording of the cantata which will ensure his immortality as a great performing artist. Some lucky singers have great works written for them;



Portrait of a rebel: Stephen Walsh's fine book traces Debussy's artistic development

others – equally fortunate – adopt them instead and the identification remains enshrined with that particular voice. Brown and *Dies natalis* is a remarkable example of such an association and merits the closer examination provided in this detailed biography of the singer.

Dies natalis was completed in 1939 and enjoyed a remarkably early recording in that very year by the soprano Joan Cross and the Boyd Neel Orchestra – virtually the only disc of Finzi's music available for many years. But the passage of the Second World War swept much pre-war cultural capital into oblivion and the era of *Peter Grimes* suddenly dawned with all the freshness of early-morning sunshine. Wilfred Brown's career as a Cambridge

modern linguist had inevitably been badly interrupted by the war but his steadfast pacifism, borne of a strong Quaker background, had also come to the fore. Although he would return frequently to Cambridge in the post-war period as a budding singer (which is how he first encountered *Dies natalis* with his old schoolfriend and accompanist John Stevens), he turned his back on academia and took to schoolteaching instead – which is where, at Bedales, he taught the two sons of Gerald Finzi – and the rest, to an extent, is history.

Finzi was summoned by his boys to hear Brown singing. Brown was eventually persuaded, by Finzi among others, to ditch teaching and to venture out as a

professional singer. It is clear that this move was potentially precarious for a man determined to create a strong family life for his wife and adopted children – and it is a considerable tribute to his tenacity that this was to prove successful. Brown's was not a heroic voice and he lacked the physical stature needed to make an opera singer; a handful of forays into this field soon convinced him of this. But the niche was there – oratorio, Lieder, English song and Evangelists in the Bach Passions. Given his inherent spirituality and an instinctive love and understanding of languages, these specific fields were to prove the perfect path for a singer of innate sensitivity and style.

As Dame Janet Baker says in an eloquent Foreword to this book, it is important to note that Brown's 'qualities as an artist went hand in hand with those of the human being'. It is in this context that the special nature of *Dies natalis* fits in. Finzi had a rare insight as a setter of words and this selection of texts by the 17th-century Hereford mystic Thomas Traherne demands a remarkable degree of identification and understanding in an interpreter. In Wilfred Brown Finzi found his perfect match, so that when the chance came in 1963 to make another recording (with the support of the Vaughan Williams Trust), his widow and sons insisted that Brown be chosen over other, potentially better-selling names, with Christopher Finzi conducting the English Chamber Orchestra. By now, of course, there are many more recordings of this evergreen score – but not one outshines the classic Brown version. This is music that fits both man and singer like a glove.

There were naturally many other sides to Brown's career – both as public performer and broadcaster of spiritually based programmes for the BBC. Stephen Duncan Johnston has undertaken heroic documentary work to present virtually every task undertaken by Brown in a tragically curtailed career. When an inoperable brain tumour was eventually diagnosed in the late 1960s, Brown faced the inevitable with all the stoic grace with which he handled life in general and he died peacefully in 1971 before reaching his 50th birthday. What marks this book out is the sense of special devotion Brown so obviously engendered in all those who knew and worked with him. The testimony of friends and colleagues is both poignant and eloquent, and we feel by the end that we have been in the presence of a rare being whose very essence can still be touched whenever we listen to his imperishable *Dies natalis* on disc.

Geraint Lewis

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Wagner's Wesendonck Lieder

Mike Ashman seeks out the strongest recorded solutions to this set of songs originally written for a female voice with piano accompaniment, which also exists in several posthumous versions

Wish fulfilment lies at the centre of the *Wesendonck Lieder* project, Wagner's only mature song-cycle. (The academic – but no longer the performing – jury is still out on whether the work actually constitutes a cycle, or if it's just a number of songs with linked themes written at the same time by one composer and one poet.) Its starting point was Wagner's ever intensifying relationship with Mathilde Wesendonck, a wealthy Zurich merchant's wife whose husband, Otto, helped finance Wagner's work and even provided him with a home to live in, one that (despite Wagner's still being *à deux* with Minna) was in dangerous and tempting proximity to Mathilde. Wagner was soon in love with Mathilde – and she, maybe more restrainedly, with him. She became his major intellectual companion of the moment, a constant audience and sounding board for everything he was writing.

As an apprentice poet herself, Mathilde was naturally influenced by Wagner's own writing. Between autumn 1857 and autumn 1858 he set five poems she had sent him, later describing two of them, No 3, 'Im Treibhaus' ('In the Hothouse', in the sense of a greenhouse), and No 5, 'Träume' ('Dreams'), as sketches for his then current opera-in-progress, *Tristan und Isolde*. 'Träume' was worked into the opera's Act 2 love duet and 'Im Treibhaus' into Act 3. The settings were at first just for voice and piano, although Wagner himself made a version of 'Träume' for violin solo and small orchestra which was premiered as a birthday offering for Mathilde in December 1857. In 1862, as always in

search of funds, Wagner abandoned his original intention to keep the songs private, allowing Schott to publish them as a group as well as allowing them to be performed in public, although Mathilde's name was not on them yet and the text was presumed to be by Wagner himself.

ORCHESTRATION AND REALISATION

The suggestion from Felix Mottl (one of the 'Nibelung chancellery' of musical assistants at Bayreuth 1876 and later a Bayreuth conductor in his own right) that the four songs remaining in piano score be orchestrated was thought originally to have been made to Wagner in 1880. But, following recent research by Malcolm Miller, it now seems that the project was initiated by Mottl's request to Cosima for permission in 1893, the date on the manuscript.

Schott then commissioned the orchestrations, on the recommendation of Cosima, from Mottl, who had by this time something of a track record for adaptations and realisations, notably of Cornelius, Chabrier and Gluck. Publication followed in 1894. The premiere of this version 'for female voice and orchestra' was probably given by Mottl's first wife, Henriette Mottl-Standhartner (1866-1933), who first appeared at the Bayreuth Festival as a solo flowermaiden in *Parsifal* in 1889 and had much success in Wagner roles in Munich from 1894. There have been other realisations or transcriptions of Wagner's original piano score since then. Among them are Henze's (1976) for alto and chamber orchestra. More recently (and

for smaller forces) there have been versions by the Swiss pianist Christian Favre of the Schumann Quartet, by the Danish composer Jan Maegaard and by the German conductor-composer Thomas Pehlken. All of these have been recorded at least once.

Rather like *Pelléas et Mélisande* on record, the *Wesendonck* discography is full of both addicts and absentees. Noticeably in the latter category are some big conductors noted for their Wagner operas – Furtwängler, Solti, Karajan – and singers like Anne Sofie von Otter and Anna Caterina Antonacci, whose interpretations have been heard in concert but not officially recorded (YouTube can help here). As for the 'addicts', more of this Collection could have been taken up with comparisons of the multiple recordings by Kirsten Flagstad (at least 11), Jessye Norman and Nina Stemme (at least four each).

LIEDER WITH PIANO

Jessye Norman's 'Im Treibhaus' from a 1991 Salzburg recital is exceptional. Together with an experienced Wagnerian maestro, James Levine, at the keyboard, she presents an immensely slow and powerful reading with tempos you might imagine from Reginald Goodall or Hans Knappertsbusch. As with all her performances of the cycle (the live 'Schmerzen' and 'Träume' from the Last Night of the Proms for Philips, under Sir Colin Davis are worthy of attention too), Norman presents the text without over-emotional identification. But it's an intelligent deliberate neutrality that avoids the stale Victorian-sounding grandeur of numerous earlier recordings of the work. Running at nearly eight minutes, Norman and Levine add more than two minutes to the song's average time, much of it coming from the pianist's expansive *Tristan*-like evocation of introduction and coda.

A cycle like the *Wesendonck Lieder* – which ranges from the dreamy ('Träume', of course) to the agonised (No 4, 'Schmerzen' – 'Sorrows' in the sense of causing you pain) to the almost Impressionistic ('Im Treibhaus') – can indeed make use of a big dynamic range. But the vocal heavyweights need not have it all their own way in a cycle of poems which began life passed personally from hand to hand, suggesting a more chamber scale. One of the most telling performances in recent years was a broadcast by Annette Dasch (Bayreuth's then Elsa – and a singer with a lighter, more early-music background) in a collaboration of Graham Johnson-like detail in words and music with pianist Wolfram Rieger.

The more successful of the selection of recordings discussed here tend to be ones



Portrait of Mathilde Wesendonck by Johann Conrad Dorner (1809-66); her relationship with Wagner led to the composition of the Wesendonck Lieder

where the singers themselves have some track record of Wagner in the theatre. They will have made definite decisions about whether or not to perform the music as a clear offshoot of *Tristan*, and how much to identify with or portray the emotional journey of each song. Wagner the opera composer may have gone through a stage of

having his dramas influenced by Lied form (in *Tristan* especially), but these Lieder are served most satisfyingly by characterisation that goes beyond the concert stage.

There are currently between 20 and 30 piano-only recordings traceable – rightly so, given that this is the only ‘pure Wagner’ version of the work. Yet – and maybe it is

because we’re mentally anticipating Mottl’s Wagner-styled orchestrations in our ears – only a few of these provide the extra detail and focus that one might expect at this more intimate level.

Dame **Margaret Price** – of course, a special-case Isolde on the classic Carlos Kleiber *Tristan* recording – creates long



Wagner in 1850, just before meeting Mathilde



'Villa Wesendonck' in 1957, the same year Wagner began setting five poems Mathilde had sent him

lines with her breath control and is most carefully accompanied by Graham Johnson in their 1993 recording. But it's all just a little too innocent, too chamber-ish, too shy of the stage to impact on a final choice. **Christine Brewer** is an often-dramatic soprano whose repertoire has ranged over the heroines of Wagner and Strauss and who (as the inclusion of the Britten *Cabaret Songs* on this 2007 Wigmore Hall recital disc demonstrates) has a cherishable sense of humour. Unfortunately, the Wagner songs appear to have been roped into the programme under the heading 'serious', and character and emotional identification are minimal. Exactly the reverse is true of **Susan Bullock** (2006), who has thought through these texts to the point of living out in tone and colour the motivation of each lyric, especially in the operatic 'Stehe still!' (No 2: 'Be Still!') and 'Schmerzen'. She's excitingly accompanied by Malcolm Martineau, even if his piano has been given a kinder, lusher acoustic than Bullock's.

Experienced Wagnerian **Ingrid Bjoner** (1984) suffers a strange balance that puts her behind her pianist. She does not match her stage successes in Munich and at home

in Norway, stiffly controlling tempos with careful singing. Hers is a word-hiding, covered tone, as if she's worried about being too loud for *Lieder*. **Kirsten Flagstad** programmed the *Wesendonck Lieder* very often post-1945, which was perhaps her way of offering less-stressful Wagner away from the tessitura and weight of the operatic roles. Her only official recording with piano (1948) finds her not in good voice, evidently nervous of the tricky vocal leaps in 'Der Engel' (No 1: 'The Angel'), and with Gerald Moore playing as if a 78rpm company man was at his side counting discs. It's disappointing. But what lacks here was compensated for in America in the early 1950s when Bruno Walter returned to the keyboard and sculpted an accompaniment not unlike Levine's – operatically sensitive to the mood and pace of each song. Flagstad was in confident and rich vocal health and, as we will also see later, became more involved with the text as the lead from the music became stronger.

LIEDER WITH ORCHESTRA

Felix Mottl's 1890s orchestration requires as much decision about direction from the conductor as it does from the singer. Is it a

counterfactual *Tristan* or just a blowing-up of the piano original – five miniature opera scenes or five songs? Rather like Cerha when he 'completed' Act 3 of Berg's *Lulu*, Mottl was obviously helped by the existence of Wagner's own setting in the complete *Tristan* of two of the songs' musical material. Mottl's instrumentation is relatively modest: strings plus pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, two to four horns and a trumpet, and occasionally timpani. (The 'Wagner orchestration' of 'Träume' has neither flutes nor oboes nor string basses.) Also, as with many such realisations, performances vary in their instrumental strengths.

Sir Thomas Beecham worked with **Kirsten Flagstad** at Covent Garden before the war (and recorded with her in a live *Tristan* not released until the days of CD, and then messily). The conductor was on terrific form in the late 1940s with his newly founded Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and his 1952 *Wesendonck Lieder* with the Norwegian soprano would come high on a list of performances demonstrating what a sensitive and detailed accompanist he could be. Beecham seeks less to sound Wagnerian and more to unite

ALTERNATIVE 'TOP' CHOICE

Studer sop Dresden Staatskapelle / Sinopoli
DG © 439 865-2GH

One conductor-composer repays another, here. Studer is well set off by Sinopoli's



original and stimulating approach, as he treats the score as 1890s music in its own right (always a speciality of his) rather than imitation Wagner.

BEST PIANO

Norman sop Levine pf
Orfeo © C926 161B

This is the climax of the singer's journey with this work, knowingly accompanied with colours aplenty from both soloist and keyboard. Who needs the orchestra? But don't ignore the fresh insights of Bullock with Martineau.



BEST HISTORICAL

Flagstad sop RPO / Beecham
Somm © SOMM-BEECHAM20

The most completely worked of the singer's many post-war versions, this is scintillatingly accompanied without constant references to *Tristan*. Beecham has thought hard about how to make the work sound like one unified suite.



the five pieces as one cycle, attending carefully to Mottl's echoing of the original's rhythms and structure. Try his start to 'Im Treibhaus' (not too much *Tristan* Act 3 here) or his 'Träume', whose inflections escape the sentimental sweetness this song often is given. Flagstad responds with fresher attention and commitment to the score than in her later American and Norwegian orchestral broadcasts of the work – or, it must be said, than in her 1956 'official' studio recording with Knappertsbusch in Vienna, part of the Decca–John Culshaw Wagner drive of that time. Orchestral detail is well captured (like the solo cello in 'Stehe still!'), although the conductor himself, also a major exponent of *Tristan*, is less extreme in choice of tempos (for example in 'Im Treibhaus') than one might have hoped for; it's almost as if he were starting subconsciously (and prematurely) to heed the reservations about his ('slow') studio conducting that producer Culshaw would express in his 1967 book *Ring Resounding*. The performance nonetheless retains a place in the catalogue as a safe, grand centrist record of the work.

An even later Scandinavian, **Nina Stemme**, can be heard with much textual care and evident love for the music in several performances on film and disc with piano and various-sized (and variously balanced) orchestras. In a chamber-orientated Wagner programme under Thomas Dausgaard in 2012 she has no anticlimactic problems with the opening 'Der Engel'; indeed, Stemme's interpretation overall relates a big stage voice to a chamber-scaled Mottl version as well as any rival. There are no original instruments (that would be a revealing prospect), but Dausgaard is wholly in sync with the work's original dramatic scale. This success is continued and enhanced on one of the work's few DVDs, filmed at Salzburg in the same year with a reduced-scale VPO and Mariss Jansons. Stemme provides a demonstration class in how to convey a dramatic work in concert, her identification with the emotions of each lyric turning 'Im Treibhaus' into a hothouse psychological thriller. This interpretation represents a most effective way of presenting this score: with a sense of power in reserve from singer, orchestra and conductor. Jansons is typically inspired in accompanying the voice.

SOME SINGERS OF GERMAN OPERA

Moving back about two Wagnerian generations, the Bayreuth stage leads of the 1950s **Martha Mödl** and **Astrid Varnay** contribute worthwhile performances of varied scales. The Mödl (1955), flexibly accompanied by Joseph Keilberth (if not



Jessye Norman gives a 'powerful reading' in 1991

over-rehearsed with the Cologne Radio Orchestra), is like a forerunner of the Stemme readings, permitting a larger voice to be intimate and empathic. In the same year, Varnay and Leopold Ludwig are

more conventionally heroic and generalised, but it's instructive (and rare) to hear this soprano's stylistic certainty in music not directly of the stage.

Staying with ladies from the world of German opera, **Waltraud Meier** once worked at the Louvre, Paris, on a semi-staging of the *Wesendonck Lieder* with Patrice Chéreau (who had directed her in a staging of *Tristan*). There's sadly no easily accessible record of this, but a French radio broadcast under Daniel Barenboim, while not matching the accompanying *Kindertotenlieder*, gives at least a suggestion of her narrative charisma as a recitalist.

Julia Varady, widow of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, appears twice in the discography, once with her husband conducting (1997), and once (in a famous wives-of-famous-husbands pairing) with Viktoria Postnikova at the piano on a most old-fashioned-looking DVD (1998). There is nothing wrong with her performance in the latter, although she seems not to have gone as far with the texts as she did with Fischer-Dieskau, and Postnikova plays her accompaniment like a foreign language. The orchestral version (the top recording in a BBC Radio 3 *Record Review* survey

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

With piano

| | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1948 | Flagstad Moore | EMI/Warner Classics Ⓢ Ⓜ 455346-2 (6/10) |
| 1952 | Flagstad Walter | Archipel Ⓜ ARPCD0144 |
| 1984 | Bjoner Steen-Nøkleberg | Sound Star-Ton Ⓢ SST30178 |
| 1991 | Norman Levine | Orfeo Ⓢ C926 161B (1/17) |
| 1993 | M Price Johnson | Forlane Ⓜ FOR16728 |
| 1998 | Varady Postnikova | EMI Ⓢ DVD 388458-9 |
| 2006 | Bullock Martineau | Avie Ⓢ AV2117 (4/07) |
| 2007 | Brewer Vignoles | Wigmore Hall Live Ⓜ WHLIVE0022 |

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

With orchestra

| | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1952 | Flagstad RPO / Beecham | Somm Ⓜ SOMM-BEECHAM20 (5/07) |
| 1955 | Mödl Cologne RSO / Keilberth | Archipel Ⓢ ARPCD396 |
| 1955 | Varnay Bavarian RSO / Ludwig | DG Eloquence Ⓢ Ⓜ ELQ480 7283 (5/59 ⁺ , 11/03 ⁺) |
| 1956 | Flagstad VPO / Knappertsbusch | Decca Eloquence Ⓢ Ⓜ ELQ480 1796 (12/56 ⁺) |
| 1961 | Crespin French National Radio Orch / Prêtre | EMI/Warner Classics Ⓢ Ⓜ 9029 58867-1 (4/62 ⁺ , 2/18) |
| 1962 | Ludwig Philh Orch / Klempner | Warner Classics Ⓢ 9029 57388-5; Ⓢ Ⓜ 9029 56902-0 |
| 1988 | Meier Orch de Paris / Barenboim | Apex Ⓢ 2564 67539-2 |
| 1992 | Kollo Orch of Deutsche Op Berlin / Thielemann | EMI/Warner Classics Ⓢ 735316-2 |
| 1993 | Studer Staatskapelle Dresden / Sinopoli | DG Ⓢ 439 865-2GH (7/94) |
| 1997 | Varady Deutsches SO Berlin / Fischer-Dieskau | Orfeo Ⓢ C467 981A |
| 2012 | Kaufmann Orch of Deutsche Op Berlin / Runnicles | Decca Ⓢ 478 5189DH (5/13); Ⓢ Ⓜ 478 5678DH; Ⓢ Ⓜ 483 0961DH |
| 2012 | Stemme Swedish CO / Dausgaard | BIS Ⓢ Ⓜ BIS2022 (8/13) |
| 2012 | Stemme VPO / Jansons | EuroArts Ⓢ DVD 207 2628; Ⓢ Ⓜ 207 2624 |

Other arrangements

| | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1994 | Van Nes Northern Sinf / Hickox (arr Henze) | Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10313 |
| 1995 | Lipovšek Philadelphia Orch / Sawallisch (arr Henze) | EMI/Warner Classics Ⓢ Ⓜ 517619-2 |
| 2007 | Lott Schumann Qt (arr Favre) | Aeon Ⓢ AECD0858 (7/08); Outhere Ⓢ REW501 |

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Nina Stemme gives 'a demonstration class in how to convey a dramatic work in concert' in 2012

last autumn) is handled by Varady with a masterly and rather aristocratic restraint, but the accompaniment is not the imaginative equal of some of the competition. It's a good listen but doesn't propose much.

MORE LADIES WORTHY OF ATTENTION

Ladies from different climes and worthy of attention include **Cheryl Studer** and Régine Crespin. Accompanying the former in 1993 is Giuseppe Sinopoli, who with his own Staatskapelle Dresden brings Mottl's work seamlessly into the 1890s, a decade in which this conductor always sounds imaginatively at home. He's lovingly attentive to the solo wind work Mottl offers, and immediately gives the orchestrator a clear identity of his own. Nothing is 'copied' from the master of Bayreuth. Studer presents a fluent reading of the emotions you would expect from the words and the music but remains essentially one voice in the interestingly balanced ensemble. Theirs is not a version to be forgotten.

Régine Crespin and Georges Prêtre (1961) are, well, very French. This also is a case of nothing copied from Bayreuth (excepting, of course, the influence of the soprano's Wagner stage roles), and if you loved Crespin's French song-cycles (as earlier reviewers obviously did), you may want to love this. Prêtre contributes more committed colour than is his wont (and a familiar lack of forward movement), although his impressionistic orchestra sounds well rehearsed, if not always in tune. The relative lightness of the reading, despite its mid-19th century feel, is a definite plus, as are Crespin's concentration and tone.

The version that has seemed to lead the field for many years was recorded in 1962,

at a time when both the mezzo-soprano (the only one in this survey) **Christa Ludwig** and her conductor Otto Klemperer were being offered complete performances of *Tristan und Isolde* – which never happened. Their collaboration stands as a strong calling card of what might have been. This is the darkest, largest, most Wagnerian (most *Tristan*-like) of these performances, made by intelligent, seeking artists, both on huge form, both far from conventional Wagnerians. It is wholly serious; it tells not of salon-like flirting but of deep love.

TENORS GET A TURN

In earlier days of the past century, when the *Wesendonck Lieder* were thought of as less of a cycle, the last two songs were often presented as a pair, a solution that appealed to tenor performers like John McCormack, Lauritz Melchior and Richard Tauber. One could argue that the wholly feminine sensibility of Mathilde's texts excludes male involvement, but that has not stopped leading Wagnerians **René Kollo** (1992) and **Jonas Kaufmann** (2012) from recording them. Their conductors (Christian Thielemann and Donald Runnicles) are imaginative – and perhaps need to be. While Kaufmann goes for wholesale emotional identification with the songs (more so than many female interpreters), Kollo, with characteristic intelligence, stands off at a kind of Brechtian (or Boulezian?) distance, observing and reporting the emotions. As a one-off, it's worth hearing.

Lastly, we take a brief look at three performances that offer alternative arrangements (or realisations, as Favre would prefer). Accompanied by what is essentially a piano quartet, **Felicity Lott** (2007) gives a sparkling, fluent performance of the songs, an approach that makes

especially atmospheric sense of 'Im Treibhaus', the singer rightly eschewing any suggestion of tragedy or melodrama.

Henze's wind section is much more extensive than Mottl's and there's also a harp, with his version of 'Schmerzen' using only harp and strings. Several of the songs' original keys are transposed. All this has been done with the intention of making the poetic content clearer and (perhaps) downplaying the more heroic aspects of Mottl's scoring, Henze being an intriguingly imperfect Wagnerite. While faithful to Wagner's piano text, he has also been interventionist, unafraid not only to change keys but also to rework rhythms (as witness the start of 'Stehe still'). Not unlike Berio's *Turandot* completion, this is a clever look back at an older, established piece – a kind of review in music of its history and of his predecessor Mottl's success (or not) at his task. The sheer joy in instrumental colours reminds one of Henze's reworking of his own opera *Elegy for Young Lovers*. Of the rival recordings, it is that by **Jard van Nes** with Richard Hickox (1994) which gets most involved with the possibilities of these new colours. **Marjana Lipovšek's** version (1995) under Wolfgang Sawallisch is much more of a straight run-through and is less courageous in asserting its individuality.

To conclude then, I wouldn't be without Flagstad's historical recording with Beecham; I hardly miss the orchestra in Norman's piano version; and the Studer–Sinopoli performance makes a serious case for the Mottl version as a work in its own right, not just as a translation. In addition, despite it not making the final four, the Henze version with Van Nes and Hickox is significant in the way that it captures a more contemporary composer's impression of what Wagner and his muse were trying to convey. But for my top choice, while for a long time the dark, serious *Tristan*-like qualities of the Ludwig–Klemperer seemed the strongest solution to this rather hybrid work, the lighter, but no less exciting, telecast of Stemme and Jansons in Salzburg, made just six years ago, provides more of the answers. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Stemme sop VPO / Jansons

EuroArts  207 2628

An ideal way to perform the Mottl cycle is with



a dramatic soprano voice and a carefully scaled down orchestra working with chamber music subtlety. As in a 21st-century Lieder recital, Stemme presents a gripping involvement with the psychology of each song.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

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Victoria Hall, Geneva & online

Menuhin Competition Finals and Closing Gala Concert, April 20, 21 & 22

If you didn't note the start of the famous violin-focused Menuhin Competition in these pages last month – live-streamed on the competition website and on [arte.tv](#) – you're still in time for its grand climax: the Junior and Senior Finals, plus the closing gala concert with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Julian Rachlin. That latter event goes large on celebrating both the brilliance of the violin and the competition, its programme to include movements of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* performed by the two category winners, plus Rachlin picking up his own violin, first to perform Kreisler's *Liebesleid* and Schön *Rosmarin*, and then Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins in B minor, RV580, alongside competition jury members Maxim Vengerov, Soyoun Yoon and Ilya Gringolts.

[menuhincompetition.org](#), [arte.tv](#)

Barbican, London & online

Sir Simon Rattle conducts Tippett's *The Rose Lake*, April 22

This fascinating programme sees Sir Simon Rattle conduct two last works from two of the 20th-century's greats, and they couldn't

be much more psychologically contrasting. First up is Tippett's *The Rose Lake*, a euphoric hymn to nature inspired by journeys to Senegal which evokes the imaginary chant of the rose-hued Lake Retba. Then comes a Rattle speciality, the desperate, disillusioned cry of Mahler's unfinished Tenth Symphony, posthumously restored by Deryck Cooke and composed amid a failing marriage and fatal heart condition and inscribed with the words, 'Farewell, farewell'. The concert is streamed live both on the LSO's YouTube channel and Facebook page, and will then be available for 90 days on demand.

[youtube.com/user/lso](#), [facebook.com/londonsymphonyorchestra](#)

Sistine Chapel, Rome & online

Sir James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* is given a performance in the Vatican, April 22

If you enjoyed the Coro recording of MacMillan's *Stabat mater* (an Editor's Choice in May 2017), here's a unique opportunity to catch the work in the spectacular setting of the Sistine Chapel, the first live concert stream ever from The Vatican. Harry Christophers conducts The Sixteen and Britten Sinfonia, the same artists who gave the premiere in 2016 of the Genesis Foundation-commissioned

work. Catch the concert live or for a month thereafter on the Classic FM website.

[classicfm.com](#)

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Joyce DiDonato stars in *Cendrillon*, April 28

Incredibly, the Met has never before staged Massenet's lush adaptation of the Cinderella fairytale. However, it's certainly pulled out the stops for this production. Directed by Laurent Pelly, it was inspired by an edition of Perrault's *Cendrillon* with illustrations by Gustave Doré that Pelly read as a child, and the set evokes the pages of a book: black and white text forming the walls, and the shapes of characters and props appearing as large cut-outs. The cast conducted by Bertrand de Billy is a stellar one, too: in the title role is Joyce DiDonato, with Alice Coote as Prince Charming, Kathleen Kim as the Fairy Godmother, and Stephanie Blythe as Cendrillon's wicked stepmother.

[metopera.org](#)

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online

Dances and Nocturnes, April 29

This exceedingly tempting programme from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, live-

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Vasily Petrenko makes his BPO debut with Michael Barenboim the soloist in Schoenberg's Violin Concerto

Schoenberg • Ravel et al

Substituting for the infirm Zubin Mehta in February, *Gramophone's* current Artist of the Year, Vasily Petrenko, took on the challenge of Schoenberg's Violin Concerto, probably not a piece he'd have chosen for his Berlin Philharmonic debut. His soloist, though, had played it more than anyone alive: Michael Barenboim, who in the event gives a coruscating account, never mired in the solo part's complexity or yielding to the temptations of introversion. The accompaniment sometimes overwhelms him – not necessarily Petrenko's fault – but it's distinguished by an almost Schubertian lyric ease that would have usefully been applied to a cautious and stiff-backed opening performance of the Overture for *Rosamunde* (originally known written for *Die Zauberharfe*).



For a second half of Ravel, the DCH archive rather puts the newcomer in its place. Compared to a suffocatingly cosseted and inflated version of *La valse* led by Andris Nelsons in 2012, manipulations of the waltz rhythm in

Petrenko's account don't draw attention to themselves, but neither does the conductor tease out instrumental voicings to anything like the lurid and sinister effect of François-Xavier Roth in 2015.

The Second Suite of *Daphnis et Chloé* is likewise strong on balletic spring, much weaker on erotic charge than Rattle and (unforgettably) Karajan. Too often the arch and sway of Petrenko's body language does most of the talking, with the response of the orchestra sensitive as one would expect – this is the Berlin Philharmonic – but somewhat pallid in the gorgeous 'Pantomime' and generically opulent in the final 'Danse générale'. **Peter Quantrill**

Available via various subscription packages to the Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at [digitalconcerthall.com](#)

streamed on the orchestra's website, captures a century of French music under the baton of Fabien Gabel. Opening proceedings is Franck's symphonic poem about a count who dared to go hunting on the Sabbath, *Le Chasseur Maudit*. Next up is Dutilleux's *Tout un monde lointain*, with Nicolas Altstaedt the cello soloist. Debussy's *Nocturnes* follows, featuring the University of Michigan Choral Union, before Ravel's *La valse* brings the concert to a swirling finale.

dso.org

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & cinemas worldwide

Sarah Lamb dances Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*, May 3

The Met isn't the only opera house gracing its stage with Massenet's music this month. It's also at Covent Garden, courtesy of the Royal Ballet. The score for Kenneth MacMillan's adaptation of *Manon* – based on the 18th-century French novel by Abbé Prévost about a woman's struggle to escape poverty, and the source of both Massenet's and Puccini's operas – is drawn from a range of Massenet's music, and not just the opera. Among the musical borrowings is his famous *Élegie*, used for the lovers' theme. Martin Yates conducts this production in his own orchestration, with Sarah Lamb dancing Manon, Vadim Muntagirov as Des Grieux, Ryoichi Hirano as Lescaut, Itziar Mendizabal as Lescaut's Mistress, and Gary Avis as Monsieur GM.

roh.org

Flagey Studio 4 & Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels & online

The Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition: semifinals May 4-5, finals May 10-12, 2018

In terms of international profile, the Queen Elisabeth is one of the most important competitions, as demonstrated by the fact that last year's first cellist winner, Victor Julien-Laferrière, has already seen his profile increase dramatically. In fact the exposure is almost more important than the top three cash prizes of €25,000, €20,000 and €17,000. For 2018, the annually rotating discipline has landed on singers, and we're particularly drawing your attention to the semifinals, for which the singers will perform with a pianist, and the finals where they perform with La Monnaie SO under Alain Altinoglu. Remote armchair viewing comes courtesy of live streams on Canvas, Ketnet and La Trois. The ensuing closing concerts will also be streamed.

quimc.be, ketnet.be, rtbf.be/tv/latrois

Gothenburg Concert Hall & online

Mei-Ann Chen guest conducts, May 5

This musically wide-ranging programme live-streamed on GSOPlay sees the Gothenburg

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* from the New Belgrade Opera



and mocked the fury of the winds of the north and south.

Monteverdi

This recording from Belgrade preserves the first ever production in Serbia of Monteverdi's first opera. The staging is an object lesson in effective simplicity, the set consisting of flights of steps divided by platforms. Much of the action takes place just above stalls level, the instruments of the orchestra ranged on either side. The top of the steps serves as a throne for Pluto and Proserpine. The costumes are just as simple, being of the tunic and sandals variety (I do not mean this pejoratively).

After the opening Toccata, the brass players in side boxes, the Spirit of Music enters; as well as gesturing for the action to begin, she appears later in silent consolation and, finally, triumph. The small chorus celebrates Orpheus's wedding with much clapping and whooping. Nicely observed touches include Orpheus wiggling his fingers as the harp plays

(air lyre?), and Proserpine indicating her displeasure to Pluto after Eurydice's second death.

Some passages – vocal and instrumental – are reassigned, and it's a pity that the moralising chorus in Act 4 is omitted. There are no great voices here, but Nikola Diskić makes an affecting Orpheus and the whole performance has an engaging sense of freshness and discovery.

Richard Lawrence

Available to watch for free until July 3, 2018 at operavision.eu

Symphony Orchestra conducted by Mei-Ann Chen, Music Director of the Chicago Sinfonietta, and Artistic Director and Conductor of the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra Summer Festival. She's brought the music of two major contemporary female composers with her. Opening proceedings is Jennifer Higdon's *blue cathedral*. Then comes Marie Samuelsson's cantata for mezzo and orchestra, *Aphrodite – Fragments by Sappho*, with soloist Katija Dragojevic. Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* then makes up the second half of the programme.

gso.se

Grosser Saal, Elbphilharmonie & online

Krzysztof Urbański conducts Holst and John Williams, May 10

Part of the Internationales Musikfest Hamburg offerings, this concert featuring the NDR Elbphilharmonie under the baton of its Principal Guest Conductor Krzysztof Urbański is not only being live-streamed on the Elbphilharmonie's website, but also broadcast live outside on the hall's Vorplatz. It's a rather fun intergalactic programme too: first, Gustav Holst's *The Planets*, and then John Williams's *Star Wars* Suite; and having these two back to back means you're especially well placed to

enjoy spotting in the latter all the various Holst references.

elbphilharmonie.de

Prague Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague & online

Prague Spring International Music Competition, Cello: May 13, French horn: May 14

Yes, another competition, but this is another biggie, meaning it'll be well worth tuning in to Czech Radio's YouTube channel for the livestreams of its finals. Part of the Prague Spring Musical Festival, the competition's past laureates – who must be under 30 at the time of the competition – include the flautist James Galway and the cellists Mstislav Rostropovich and Natalia Gutman; and indeed the cello is one of 2018's pair of annually rotating instruments, along with the French horn. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the judging panels include some big names: Anne Gastinel and Quirine Viersen are on the cello jury chaired by Michal Kaňka, while the French horn jury, chaired by Radovan Vlatković, includes André Cazalet and Kerry Turner. Beyond cash prizes and the sheer prestige of winning, one especially covetable special prize is the Czech Radio Prize of a free studio recording.

competition.festival.cz

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A novel – and very stylish – desktop DAC/amplifier and the most ‘do-it-all’ Naim network music system yet.

Andrew Everard
Audio Editor

MAY TEST DISCS



Solo Bach on a period violin, recorded in formats up to DSD256 – this is a demonstration-class recording from Channel Classics.



Handel arias from the countertenor Franco Fagioli, accompanied by Il Pomo d'Oro and sounding vibrant and exciting in 96kHz/24bit.

From desktop audio to revived classics

A new Bluetooth speaker, the return of a design more than 30 years old, and a stylish all-in-one



The trend towards compact active speakers complete with wireless music capability seems unstoppable; one of the latest arrivals is the Wharfedale DS-2 **1**, a sub-£200 pair of speakers designed to sit at the heart of a complete ‘desktop audio’ system. Based on the now-discontinued DS-1 model, the new design combines Bluetooth wireless connectivity with aptX, 2x15W amplification and Wharfedale’s in-house driver expertise to create a compact design selling for £180 a pair, and voiced to be used on a shelf or table, close to a rear wall. The speakers use a 19mm silk dome tweeter and 7.5cm mid/bass driver tuned with a reflex port, and the speakers are finished in high gloss with leatherette trim.

Just to prove they’ve been busy at the huge Chinese plant where Wharfedales are made, stablemate Quad has launched a one-box system in its Artera line, the £1500 Artera Solus **2**. Combining a CD player, pre-amp and dual-mono 2x75W power amplification, the system can handle files all the way up to 384kHz/32 bit and DSD256 via its USB Type B ‘computer’ input, and has conventional digital inputs, an analogue input and Bluetooth wireless connectivity. It’s designed as the first of two models in the series; later in the year the second will

arrive complete with Wi-Fi and network streaming, and owners of the initial model will be able to upgrade their system to the full network version at that time.

Another classic hi-fi name – Klipsch – has announced the Forte III loudspeakers **3**, the latest arrival in its Heritage line. Based on an acclaimed speaker launched in 1985 but out of production for more than 20 years, the Forte III is a floorstanding three-way speaker using a 30cm woofer and two compression drivers – a 45mm mid-range and a 25mm tweeter. A 38cm passive radiator to the rear of each speaker reinforces the bass, and the design has been thoroughly re-engineered with both cosmetic and acoustic improvements. The Forte III is available in American Walnut, Natural Cherry, Black Ash and Distressed Oak finishes, at £4000/pr.

Not to be outdone, Acoustic Energy has launched a complete new speaker range, the 300 Series **4**, to build on the technology of its 100 Series models. The range starts with the £599/pr AE300 standmount speakers, and goes up to the AE309 floorstanders, which start from £999 depending on finish. The speakers use a new 28mm aluminium tweeter developed for the series, with Wide Dispersion technology waveguides

to shape the output to match that of the latest-generation 13cm mid/bass unit, which has a new shallow-profile cone made from a ceramic/aluminium sandwich. A single bass unit is used in the AE300 and two in the slim AE309s, with bass tuning courtesy of a slot-shaped port designed for smooth airflow. The range will be joined by the AE307 centre speaker and AE308 active subwoofer in the summer.

Just in case you thought the disc player was living on borrowed time, and the disc transport even more so, McIntosh has launched a new model, the £5995 MCT500 SACD/CD Transport **5**. As well as playing those discs, it will handle a wide range of files either on user-created CD and DVD discs or from USB flash drives. Format compatibility goes all the way up to 192kHz/24 bit and DSD128, with output on balanced XLR, coaxial and optical digital, plus MacIntosh’s proprietary MCT connection for DSD playback. The player uses buffering to handle error-correction, reading data at twice the speed required for playback. The MCT500 comes in classic McIntosh style, with a polished stainless steel chassis, backlit glass front panel and aluminium detailing. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Naim Uniti Star

Naim's mid-range Uniti model adds to its appeal with built-in CD playback and ripping

Sometimes it's difficult to be the middle model in a line-up. The flagship will get all the attention for its superior technology and (hopefully) performance, while the entry-level design is likely to attract those who like the idea but are on a tight budget. That might have been the fate of £3499 Naim's Uniti Star, bookended in the company's latest Uniti range by the £1999 Atom and the £4199 Nova. However, the Salisbury company has played it clever with its new series, giving each of the three Uniti models its own characteristics, features and thus appeal.

Yes, all three share common styling cues, with that oversize volume control on the top panel, derived from the company's Statement NAC S1 pre-amplifier via its Mu-so all-in-one systems, colour display and new-style casework complete with an acrylic base through which glows the corporate logo in white. And under the skin is, of course, the 'platform for the future' Naim announced with the new Uniti models, offering extended file format and digital services compatibility, plus enhanced upgradability to cope with any developments that may loom on the horizon.

But what sets the Uniti Star apart from its stablemates is its built-in CD drive for both playback and disc-ripping. With the other Uniti models you either need to consider an offboard CD drive for use with the Uniti Nova or invest in the purpose-built Uniti Core, which is an all-in-one ripping/storage device designed to serve music to a network.

The Star, however, has simplified this functionality into one unit, being both the means of ripping the music and also the device to play it, even though it has no built-in storage. The idea is that you can set it to store the music it rips to either an attached USB hard drive or a network storage unit. What's more, as well as ripping the music and acting as a network player, the Star can also make music stored on a USB drive plugged into it available to other Uniti, Mu-so or ND- series products on your home network – and indeed to other DLNA/UPnP devices, too.

What sets the Uniti Star apart from its stablemates is its built-in CD drive for both playback and disc-ripping

That means those wanting a 'pure music' network set-up could avoid the need for a NAS unit and just add a USB drive to the Star – although if you want large-scale storage you'd probably be best advised to consider a 'desktop' USB drive with its own power supply rather than one of the portable models powered via USB. Among the USB devices I used, the Star worked fine with 500GB WD and Toshiba models but for the big stuff I went for powered drives. And with £100 or so buying a 4TB unit you could hook up and hide away somewhere, you won't miss the Star's lack of an internal hard drive. Once the storage is connected and you've told the Naim via its app that's where you want your music stored, the process is entirely seamless, the 'server' function supporting up to 20,000-track libraries.



NAIM UNITI STAR

Type Network music system

Price £3499 (£3649 with DAB/FM tuner)

Inputs 2xUSB Type A; one BNC, two optical and two coaxial digital; two analogue (one on RCA phono, one DIN), HDMI with ARC, Bluetooth with aptX, AirPlay

Outputs One pair of speakers, pre-outs, headphones

Output power 70W per channel

Networking Ethernet, Wi-Fi

Services UPnP streaming, internet radio, Spotify Connect, Tidal, Roon-ready, Chromecast built in

Format handling Up to 384kHz/24 bit in FLAC/ALAC/AIFF, 284kHz/32 bit in WAV, DSD64/128, MP3/AAC/OGG/WMA

Remote control Yes, supplied, plus Naim app on Android/iOS

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.2x9.5x26.5cm
naimaudio.com

All of this adds greatly to the appeal of the Uniti Star; but the features it shares with the other models in the range are pretty comprehensive, too, making this an

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Naim is a complete 'just add speakers' system. So ...

The **NEAT IOTA ALPHA SPEAKERS** will work very well with the Uniti Star, combining as they do compact dimensions with a big powerful sound.



KEF'S ORIGINAL LS50 SPEAKERS are a good 'bookshelf' choice for use with the Naim, thanks to their precise imaging and detail.



excellent all-round system choice. As well as UPnP/DLNA streaming from network stores such as computers and NAS drives, the Star's choice of Ethernet or Wi-Fi networking allows users to access a range of streaming services including Spotify Connect, Tidal, internet radio and more, plus the inclusion of Chromecast built in means it can also accept audio from a wide range of apps. There's also both Bluetooth and AirPlay wireless connectivity and a DAB/FM radio tuner as a £150 option; and, of course, it can link up with a range of other Naim network products to create a multiroom audio system, all under the control of Naim's dedicated app for Android or iOS phones and tablets.

Finally, the Star is also Roon-ready, meaning it can act as an end point for a complete Roon audio system – and, in common with other latest-generation Uniti products, can handle audio at up to 384kHz/24 bit in FLAC, ALAC and AIFF, 284kHz/32 bit in WAV, and DSD64/128. Improved wireless connectivity allows even high sampling/bit-rate audio to be carried over Wi-Fi, the system having concealed antennae in place of the rubber stub aerial used on earlier Uniti models, but I'd still suggest a wired network connection for ultimate stability.

Digital inputs are provided on two optical, two coaxial and one BNC socket, and the Star has analogue inputs on both RCA phonos and Naim's favoured DIN socket, while in addition to the two USB ports there's also an SD card slot for music playback. TV sound is catered for by an HDMI input with Audio Return Channel capability, allowing a simple connection from a television to the Star. All the inputs can be configured and adjusted from the Naim app, including the setting of input trims to even up levels. There's also a fixed-level option on the analogue inputs for use with the pre-outs of AV receivers and processors.

Along with the usual Naim 4mm speaker sockets, fed from the internal 70Wpc Class AB amplification, the Star also has stereo pre-outs for an external power amplifier or a subwoofer and a 3.5mm headphone socket. A radio-frequency remote handset is provided, this allowing operation without direct line of sight as

well as giving feedback of volume control and the like.

PERFORMANCE

The appeal of the Uniti Star is clear. It aims to be all the system a user could ever need and to act as a 'just add speakers' entertainment solution. To say it succeeds in this aim is something of an understatement: even were one to view the Star purely as an amplifier, fed from external sources, it would be an excellent performer; but when one adds in the huge flexibility here, plus the ease of use via either dedicated remote or Naim app, this is a very strong contender in the 'great hi-fi made user-friendly' market.

It has the power to drive very good speakers to convincing effect, with a lovely fluidity to the sound that is able instantly to change to snap, drive and dynamics when required. Playing Angela and Jennifer Chun's set of music by Glass and Muhly in 88.2kHz/24 bit (Harmonia Mundi, 7/16), the Naim displays excellent control and insight plus speed and attack in Muhly's *Four Studies* and Glass's *Mad Rush*, while the weight and sonority of the piano in Murray Perahia's reading of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, in 96kHz/24 bit (DG, 3/18) is truly thrilling, underpinned as it is with delicacy and dexterity.

This deft speed is also much in evidence with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's set of Beethoven music for winds (Linn – see page 52) in 192kHz/24 bit, while the Naim also shines with DSD recordings – but then with everything from internet radio stations to Tidal streams and upwards, this system never sounds anything less than fresh and totally assured. There's real depth of ability here: the Naim switches seamlessly between the wide range of services on offer via the app, putting a huge range of entertainment at the user's fingertips.

That it does so with style and without fuss simply adds to the value for money. Yes, the Star is a premium-price product and there are rivals available offering quite a bit of what it does for less money, but in many ways this system is the spiritual successor to the original Naim Uniti of 2010 and offers both enhanced performance and considerably more flexibility. **G**

Or you could try ...

The Naim Uniti Star is unashamedly a premium network system but you can get some, if not all of what it offers for less money. And it's not without direct competition.

Denon DRA-100

As budget solutions go, the Denon DRA-100 offers a good start in network streaming in a compact form. Selling from around £675 and part of the company's sleek Design Series, it offers DLNA and USB playback plus streaming services, and has 70Wpc amplification built in. If you want to play CDs there's a matching player, the DCD-50, which you can find for £250 or so – it won't rip CDs but it is a very good player. More information at denon.co.uk



Technics SU-C550

Technics offers several all-in-one streaming systems – there's even one model complete with built-in speakers – but the SU-C550, at around £1200, is perhaps the closest to the Uniti concept. As well as built-in streaming and amplification, it also packs a CD player under a pivoting glass lid on the top panel. There's a lot of technology derived from the company's upmarket hi-fi separates here, including Digital Noise Isolation and a circuit to optimise the unit to the speakers with which it's used, and the system will play files at up to 192kHz/24 bit and DSD56/128. For more information see technics.com/uk.



Musical Fidelity M6 Encore 225

Musical Fidelity's £4399 M6 Encore 225 system offers much of the functionality of the Naim, including network player/server operation and CD ripping. There's also a built-in 1TB hard drive to store your music, which can be upgraded to larger capacities, and a hefty 225W per channel of amplification. Find out more at encore.musicalfidelity.com.



REVIEW ASTELL & KERN ACRO L1000

Remarkable sound via 'phones

A desktop digital converter and headphone amp that can also drive speakers – and has excellent style and appeal

Combination digital converter/headphone amplifiers are nothing new but here we have twist on the theme, in the form of Astell & Kern's £799 ACRO L1000. The first in a new line of desktop products to be launched by the company under the ACRO name, this is a hefty slab of aluminium crowned with a large, beautifully smooth volume control, designed to be connected to a computer via a microUSB socket on the rear, for which a cable is supplied. But this is more than just another headphone amp, even though it has no fewer than four headphone outputs. It can also drive a pair of speakers via a solid set of combination terminals on the rear, able to take bare wires, spades or banana plugs. Yes, the output here is just 15W per channel, but that shouldn't be a problem when driving speakers in a desktop set-up: close-up listening doesn't require a lot of power to deliver convincing volume and dynamics.

With its striking styling, sliced off at an angle to create a wedge shape, it looks like nothing else on the market

With its striking styling – it's a gunmetal-finished cube sliced off at an angle to create a wedge shape, which then has a scalloped barrel cut into it to support that deliciously fluid knurled volume control – the ACRO L1000 looks like nothing else on the market, but then that shouldn't come as a surprise given its provenance. After all, the South Korean company, a division of MP3 pioneer iRiver, has more or less redefined the pocket music player as a covetable object, not to mention launching its AK500 system of media player/ripper, power amplifier and power supply, which is very much a high-end audio system in miniature, capable of quite remarkable performance.

The L1000 is powered by a laptop-style offboard mains converter and, along with the microUSB socket and mains input speaker terminals on its rear panel, has an XLR balanced headphone output and a speaker on/off switch: turn this off and you are in headphone mode. On the left face are headphone sockets on 6.3mm and 3.5mm conventional sockets, plus a 2.5mm

four-pole balanced socket, beside which is a push-button to select normal operation, high gain for demanding headphones and bass boost, the mode in use indicated by a blue/red/green LED telltale to the left of the volume control.

Under the control is a rim of red illumination to show the unit is on, power being switched on and off with a slim button at the top of the left panel, which you need to hold for a few seconds to operate. Switch on and a ring of white LEDs around the volume control sweeps up and down while the unit initialises, before settling into volume level indication mode.

Inside, the L1000 uses the same Asahi Kasei AK4490 digital-to-analogue converters the company fits in its high-end AK380 personal player, these allowing it to handle PCM audio up to 384kHz/32 bit and DSD up to 11.2MHz in native form, rather than having to convert or downsample. A 32-bit processor handles the digital filtering and other adjustments, and the device is notable for its minimal controls – whatever file format you send down the USB cable it simply handles, with no fuss whatsoever.

PERFORMANCE

I used the L1000 on the end of my Mac Mini computer, running Roon and Audirvana for playback, and driving a range of headphones including the Oppo PM-1 planar magnetic model connected both conventionally and in balanced mode, and the flagship Bowers & Wilkins P9. In each case the results were nothing short of remarkable. So too was the way the Astell & Kern drove my usual desktop speakers, the original Neat Acoustics Iotas, which sit on foam wedges either side of my screen.

The Oppo headphones benefited from the use of the high gain setting; and though the bass boost facility added a little extra warmth to the sound, once the amplifier and headphones had been running for a while it was clear it wasn't really needed. The tight, fast bass of the various combinations wasn't short of extension and gave a solid, agile foundation to the music.

Playing the recent Scottish Chamber Orchestra set of Beethoven music for wind instruments (Linn – see page 52)



SPECIFICATION

ASTELL & KERN ACRO L1000

Type DAC/amplifier

Price £799

Inputs MicroUSB

File formats played PCM to 384kHz/32 bit, DSD to 11.2MHz/DSD256

Outputs Headphones on 3.5mm and 6.3mm sockets, plus 2.5mm and XLR balanced, one pair of speakers

Output power 6V unbalanced, 8.5V balanced, 15Wpc into speakers

Accessories supplied 12V 5A power supply, USB cable

Dimensions (WxHxD) 11.3x11.3x16cm
astellinkern.com

in 192kHz/24 bit showed the deftness and dynamic ability of the L1000, with beautifully resolved instrumental timbres and a real sense of presence to the sound. The more I listened, the more impressed I became with the way the system brought me closer to the music, whether with the warm, rich Bowers & Wilkins headphones or the slightly leaner Oppos. The sound was similarly effective through the compact Neat speakers. Similarly, with Ben Goldscheider's Debut set (Willowhayne – see page 62), again in 192kHz/24 bit, that remarkable focus on the solo instrument was as thrilling as the dynamics were occasionally alarming – real frisson-inducing stuff!

But even better was to come, with the DSD256 release of the Norske Jentekor's Folketoner (2L). It's a wonderfully atmospheric recording and its ethereal quality was as vivid via this little amplifier and a pair of good headphones as I have ever heard it. It's also worth noting how well judged is the volume control on the L1000: its 'gearing' makes it easy to set exactly the level required, with no nasty shocks to catch one unawares. Add to that the sheer tactile appeal of the Astell & Kern and its visual presence, and this is definitely a superior addition to any 'desktop audio' set-up – and quite possibly a design classic in the making. **G**

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● ESSAY

Hi-fi is changing but music remains front and centre

The way we buy is undergoing major alterations, along with how people listen, but the desire to hear good music played well gives Andrew Everard cause for hope

After my comments last month on the vanishing role of hi-fi in the greater consumer electronics market, I was heartened to hear from friends that their youngest child had decided on his career path. 'He wants to be a hi-fi dealer', they said, somewhat to my surprise.

You see, that's one of the dreams I guess a lot of us had at his age, all those years ago. The idea of spending one's time listening to music on great audio equipment and sharing the love of fine sound with others seemed pretty tempting – and if it could provide a living too, so much the better. After all, I'm sure that's how many think I spend my life! A nicely placed shop with an excellent demonstration room, stocked with hand-picked equipment meaning you only needed sell the products you really liked; an envy-inducing collection of great music and limitless fine coffee; customers wandering in, itching to get in touch with even better sound – that would do very nicely, thank you.

Except, for every 'boutique' hi-fi dealer I meet, living the dream with their own new concept in retailing (always set to be the one that changes the world), there's another bewailing what a hard slog it is at the audio coalface these days. Battered by the vagaries of technology beyond their control, from new streaming services to the arrival of competing and incompatible 'smart home' systems, and with the likes of Apple seemingly hell-bent on creating closed eco-systems controlling music in the audio equivalent of 'farm to fork', even some very experienced retailers are saying they feel like they're losing control of a market they thought they knew.

One of the problems is that, given that this is an industry steeped in technology, some sectors of the hi-fi world have been rather slow to embrace the changing ways music is played these days. The moan that 'kids today aren't interested in good sound' is a familiar one; and while some retailers are happy enough to sell products that can stream music from a home network or the wider internet, fewer of them have the expertise to advise consumers on how to



In the modern audio landscape anything's possible, even this striking portable tape recorder, soon to be launched by Metaxas & Sins. It's all about more ways of enjoying music

set up such a system, let alone troubleshoot one. That much I know from personal experience: you'd be surprised how many emails I get beginning 'After reading your review, I bought a ...' and end with 'Please help – the dealer doesn't seem to have a clue!'

A nicely placed shop with an excellent demonstration room – that would do very nicely, thank you

Other retailers – and, I have to say, some reviewers of my acquaintance – have instead adopted a bunker mentality, rejecting what I heard described recently as 'all this computer nonsense' and instead clinging on to the so-called 'vinyl revival' as the way to go. However, there are signs that this may not be conservative commonsense in the face of passing trends but rather a fad in itself. Yes, there are those who have always played records and continue to do so, but the relative rise in sales of records is more about the declining popularity of CDs in the face of streaming services. Despite almost 27 per cent growth year on year, vinyl still only accounted for 10 per cent of 2017's 'physical media' sales in the UK, with 4m albums sold out of a total of 135.1m albums bought, downloaded or streamed (the record industry counts every 1000 tracks streamed as a 'Streaming Equivalence Album' – in all, a somewhat staggering 68.1bn music streams were served during the year).

That means vinyl still only accounted for 3 per cent of total music consumption, and there are signs that the boom in sales of players may also be slowing: 2017 turntable sales were down almost 5 per cent on 2016 levels, the first decline in recent years. That could just be because almost everyone who wants a record player now has one or it could be that the fashion-led audio market is moving on to something else – I keep hearing mutterings that we are long overdue a revival of the humble audio cassette.

Yes, really. Once it seemed that you could hardly give a cassette deck away but now there are signs that prices on auction sites are

beginning to firm up a bit, especially for high-end models. Even more noticeable is that there's a revival of interest in tape in general: I know of several friends who are buying reel-to-reel machines and restoring them, vintage commercial tape releases seem to be gaining a collector's market and companies such as Slovakia-based Horch House are selling new reel-to-reel copies of classic albums. Callas singing Tosca on 15ips tape? Yours for €698! All of which has been enough to see German company Ballfinger launch brand-new reel-to-reel recorders or *Tonbandmaschinen*, using components made in its own factories. Think just shy of £25,000 for its flagship M 063 model. Meanwhile, the Dutch-based high-end company Metaxas & Sins – yes, the spelling is deliberate! – is planning its own reel-to-reel machine, the GQT. A portable, sculptural device, it's been developed in cooperation with Stellavox and named as a tribute to that company's founder, Georges Quellet.

Yes, hi-fi may be changing, and indeed becoming ever more fragmented, but music remains front and centre – it's the ways of listening to it that are growing in diversity, which can only be a good thing. And the aspiring hi-fi retailer? Does he have in mind a converted pub, restored watermill, repurposed Victorian butcher's shop or some other novel location for his brave new concept in audio retailing? Not quite: yes, he's going to be handling traditional hi-fi products, he says, but via an eBay shop. Welcome to the modern world of audio. **G**

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NOTES & LETTERS

William Steinberg • André Tchaikowsky • Shostakovich's coded messages • First recordings

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William Steinberg

Rob Cowan's claim on many occasions in your pages that William Steinberg is the most under-recorded of great conductors from the second half of the 20th century is certainly justified if one considers only the recordings currently available on official labels. Most of his Columbia recordings with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra were included in a Warner Classics Icons box, but his recordings with the same orchestra in the 1960s for Enoch Light's Command Classics are much more difficult to obtain, despite the high quality. The copyright must belong to Universal, but they have made little effort to make the recordings available. As a result one has to turn to independent labels that have made transcriptions from LP or from reel-to-reel tape, with decidedly variable results.

I suppose I have a fondness for Steinberg's recordings because many were available on the Classics for Pleasure label when I was beginning to collect classical music. I recently decided to try to put together his Beethoven cycle and I ended up paying out a small fortune for recordings from different sources just to piece together a set with sound that was worthy of the performances.

Other recordings made in the 1960s include a Brahms symphony set, individual symphonies from Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Bruckner and Shostakovich plus orchestral pieces from Wagner, J Strauss, Saint-Saëns, Dvořák, Ravel, Stravinsky, Berlioz, Gershwin and Copland. As we approach the 40th anniversary of Steinberg's death, how fitting it would be if these performances could again be made widely available.

*Dr Peter Sweeney
Guildford, Surrey*

Coded Shostakovich

In the interesting review (February, page 106) of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, there is mention of his personal monogram, DSCH. Not only does it recur in many of his works (symphonies, concertos and quartets) but he also makes reference to other composers' themes.

There is perhaps one other. It appears in several works, namely 'What shall we do with the Drunken Sailor?' (which also contains DS).

Letter of the Month



The pianist and composer André Tchaikowsky studying a score al fresco

André Tchaikowsky

Bryce Morrison's review of André Tchaikowsky's complete RCA recordings (April, page 122) paints a picture of a hugely complex but colourful musician – who of course, at the time of his desperately early death, bequeathed his skull to the Royal Shakespeare Company for use in productions of *Hamlet*.

In the late 1970s he came to perform a recital on the new Steinway B at the Strode Theatre, Street, Somerset, for the Glastonbury and Street Music Club (before its own demise in 1980).

Shortly before his hugely anticipated arrival onstage at 7.30pm, Roy Tomlin, Secretary of the Club, appeared and hushed the audience. 'Gentlemen in the audience,' he said, 'I have to ask if any of you is wearing a pair of cufflinks which you would be prepared to lend Mr Tchaikowsky, please, as he has forgotten his own.' I don't recall who donated his, but the recital went ahead with André Tchaikowsky immaculate both musically and sartorially!

*Hywel Jenkins
Glastonbury, Somerset*

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put himself in in such a manner that the authorities are wondering what to do with him? The next words are 'Er-lie in the morning'. Might this refer to the dreaded Stalin knock at the front-door? The Second Piano Concerto is full of it, and there is also a few seconds of it in his Ninth Symphony (rather brave, considering that Stalin was still alive).

In a concert programme of the Second Piano Concerto at the Royal Festival Hall back in 1981, Eric Mason mentioned this 'Drunken sailor' shanty.

I've pondered this theory for many years. Do any Shostakovich experts have any thoughts on this possibly being another of the Shostakovich coded signals?

*Peter Davey
Bristol*

The first is still the best?

Can some psychiatrist explain this phenomenon: why, despite impressive advances in sonics and interpretation of classical masterworks over the last

half-century, plus a vast LP and CD library, is it often the earliest recordings one possessed as a young collector that retain a unique power, irresistible allure and prime place of honour in one's affections? For example, Menuhin in the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto; Reiner's Respighi; Toscanini in Dvořák's *New World*; Kempff's *Emperor*; Cliburn's Rachmaninov Third; Mravinsky's Tchaikovsky – one could go on endlessly. I confess I feel no urge to hear Currentzis's *Pathétique*, when my beloved

Boult/LPO/1950s Pye Golden Guinea (shamefully never yet issued on CD) still excites and satisfies me so completely. Is it just me?

Stuart J Mitchell
Glasgow

Editorial note

The photograph of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Sir Georg Solti (March, page 82) was taken in the Musikhalle in Hamburg, and not in Orchestra Hall, Chicago, as captioned.

OBITUARIES

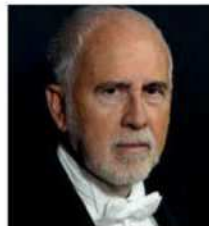
A fine Spanish conductor and one of the great American pianists

JESÚS LÓPEZ COBOS

Conductor

Born February 25, 1940

Died March 2, 2018



The Spanish conductor Jesús López Cobos has died in Berlin at the age of 78.

López Cobos held several music director positions at leading orchestras throughout a long and successful career. He was the Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1986 to 2001, making several highly-regarded recordings for Telarc, and later became their Conductor Emeritus. López Cobos was also General Music Director of the Deutsche Oper in Berlin (1981-90), Music Director of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra (1991-2000) and Music Director of the Teatro Real in Madrid (2003-10).

It was often López Cobos's superb ear for instrumental balance, colour and detail that separated his recordings and performances from those of other conductors. His recording of Shostakovich's Symphonies Nos 1 and 15 with the Cincinnati SO drew high praise from *Gramophone's* reviewers.

In 1983, López Cobos made a live recording of Verdi's Requiem with the London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra. 'Central to the experience,' wrote Richard Osborne, 'is the 43-year-old Spanish born Jesús López Cobos, whose conducting has fire, grace and an enviably unselfconscious feel for the work's musical and spiritual dynamic.'

From López Cobos's time at Teatro Real in Madrid there are several outstanding video performances, including Verdi's *La traviata* (an Editor's

Choice in December 2006), Puccini's *La bohème* and a wonderful *Carv & Pag*.

López Cobos was active right up until his death: he was due to conduct Verdi's *Aida* and *Un ballo in maschera* at the Vienna State Opera this season.

IVAN DAVIS

Pianist

Born February 4, 1932

Died March 12, 2018



One of only seven pupils of Vladimir Horowitz, Ivan Davis has died aged 86: he received a phone call from the great pianist the day after he won New York's Franz

Liszt Competition in 1960 with the offer of lessons. Davis had studied at the University of North Texas College of Music and then, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Santa Cecilia Academy in Rome with Carlo Zecchi.

At the time of his Liszt Competition win, Davis, possessor of a virtuoso technique, had already signed a contract with CBS and was engaged for a 60-concert US tour. Concerto dates with many of the US's leading orchestras and conductors followed. In the 1970s, he signed to Decca recording Rachmaninov's Second Piano (RPO and Henry Lewis), Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (Cleveland and Lorin Maazel), and Liszt's concertos (RPO and Edward Downes). His Decca output also included a solo album in which each piece was dedicated to a famous pianist (Clara Schumann, Anton Rubinstein, Josef Lhévinne and others).

In 1966 he started teaching at the University of Miami music school, a post he held for 42 years. He retired from performance in October 2008, bowing out with Schumann's *Kinderszenen*.

NEXT MONTH JUNE 2018



Esa-Pekka Salonen

As he marks his 60th birthday, we meet with the Finnish musician to talk about the relationship between composing and conducting – and between music and life

Parry, a century on

Parry scholar Jeremy Dibble argues that the composer's music, long treated with indifference, is finally getting its due – and not before time

Suk's Asrael Symphony

In next month's Collection feature, we survey the recordings of the large, intricate symphony dedicated to the memory of Dvořák and Suk's wife

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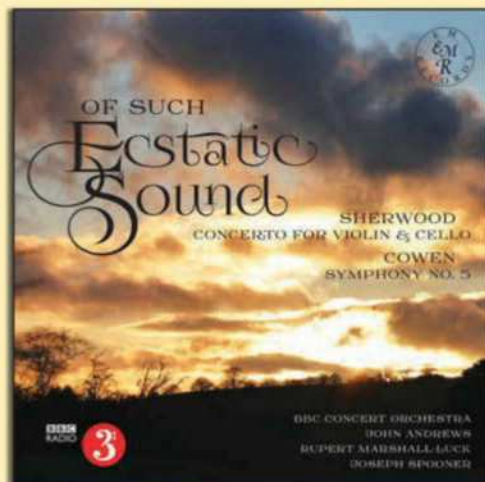
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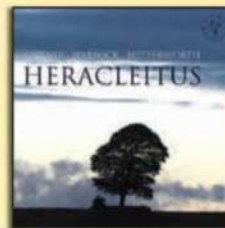
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REVIEWS INDEX

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| A | Abrahamsen | String Quartets – No 1, '10 Preludes'; No 2; No 3; No 4 | 52 |
| | Arakishvili | The Legend of Shota Rustaveli – Misi sakheili Tinalin | 97 |
| | Arne | Alfred – Heav'n, O hear me! | 86 |
| | | Artaxerxes – Why is death for ever late | 86 |
| | B | | |
| | Bach, JS | An Wasserflüssen Babylon, BWV653 | 52 |
| | | Börner Jesu meine Freude, after BWV794 | 52 |
| | | Cantata No 63 | 46 |
| | | Concerto a 4, BWV548/885 | 52 |
| | | Herzlich tut mich verlangen, BWV727 | 66 |
| | | Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter, BWV650 | 52 |
| | | O Mensch, bewein' dein Sünde gross, BWV622 | 52 |
| | | Preludes and Fugues – BWV541; BWV543 | 66 |
| | | St John Passion, BWV245 (1749 version) | 76 |
| | | Trio Sonata No 2, BWV526 | 66 |
| | | Trio Sonatas – after BWV1028; after BWV1032; BWVAnh111/655/584/676 | 52 |
| | | Violin Partita in D minor | 106 |
| | | Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein, BWV641 | 52 |
| | | Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten, after BWV797 | 52 |
| | | Das wohltemperirte Clavier – Prelude No 1, BWV846 | 72 |
| Bartók | | The Miraculous Mandarin, Sz73 – Suite | 46 |
| | | Solo Sonata for Violin | 107 |
| | | Violin Concertos – Nos 1 & 2 | 30 |
| | Beamish | Caliban | 62 |
| | Bedrossian | Twist | 43 |
| | Beethoven | Duo, WoO27 No 1 | 52 |
| | | March, WoO29 | 52 |
| | | Octet, Op 103 | 52 |
| | | Piano Concertos – Nos 2 & 4 | 32 |
| | | Piano Sonata No 31 | 72 |
| | | Piano Sonatas – No 1; No 2; No 6 | 67 |
| | | Piano Sonatas – No 2; No 17, 'Tempest'; No 20; No 30 | 66 |
| | | Piano Trio in C minor – Op 1 No 3 | 107 |
| | | Rondino, WoO25 | 52 |
| | | Sextet, Op 71 | 52 |
| | | String Quartets – No 10, 'Harp'; No 12; No 15 | 107 |
| | | String Quartets, Op 18 – No 1; No 2; No 3 | 53 |
| | | Violin Concerto | 106 |
| | | Violin Sonata No 7 | 107 |
| | Bernstein | Mass | 76 |
| | | Serenade (after Plato's 'Symposium') | 32 |
| | | Symphonic Dances from West Side Story | 47 |
| | Bizet | Carmen – L'amour est un oiseau rebelle (Habanera); Près des remparts de Séville (Seguidilla) | 97 |
| | Bliss | Theme and Cadenza for Violin and Orchestra | 106 |
| | | Violin Concerto | 106 |
| | Borgström | Violin Concerto, Op 25 | 33 |
| | Bowen | Horn Sonata, Op 101 | 62 |
| | Brahms | F-A-E Sonata – Scherzo | 107 |
| | | Violin Concerto | 107 |
| | | Violin Sonata No 3 | 107 |
| Brocal | | Nature morte | 71 |
| | Brown, JF | Evening Changes | 62 |
| | Bruch | Scottish Fantasy | 106 |
| | | Violin Concerto No 1 | 106 |
| | Bruckner | Symphony No 1 | 35 |
| | Buonamente | Sonate et canzoni – Sonata a 6 | 44 |
| | Byrd | Motets | 77 |
| | C | | |
| | Carpenter | Edradour | 62 |
| | Chopin | Fantaisie, Op 49 | 72 |
| | | Nocturnes – No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 17, Op 62 No 1 | 72 |
| | | Polonaise-fantaisie, Op 61 | 72 |
| | Ciampi | Adriano in Siria – O Dio! Mancar mi sento | 86 |
| | | Il trionfo di Camilla – Là per l'ombrosa sponda | 86 |
| | Copland | Clarinet Concerto | 35 |
| | | Fanfare for the Common Man | 35 |
| | | Rodeo – Hoedown | 35 |
| | | El Salón México | 35 |
| | | The Tender Land – Suite | 35 |
| | Couperin, F | Pièces de clavecin: Book 1 – La Favorite; Book 3 – Ordre 13ème; Ordre 18ème | 67 |
| D | Danckerts | Missa de Beata Virgine | 79 |
| | Debussy | Arabesque No 1 | 68 |
| | | Children's Corner – The Little Shepherd | 68 |
| | | La mer | 46 |
| | | La plus que lent | 68 |
| | | Preludes – Danseuses de Delphes; Voiles; La fille aux cheveux de lin; La cathédrale engloutie; Minstrels | 68 |
| | | Réverie | 68 |
| | | String Quartet, Op 10 | 52 |
| | | Suite bergamasque – Clair de lune | 68 |
| | Dickinson | A Rag for McCabe | 62 |
| | Dillon | The Gates | 43 |
| | Dohnányi | Albumblatt | 68 |
| | | Five Humoresques in the Form of a Suite, Op 17 | 68 |
| | | Four Rhapsodies, Op 11 | 68 |
| | | Gavotte and Musette | 68 |
| | | Klavierstücke – Op 2; Op 41 | 68 |
| | Winterreigen | Op 13 | 68 |
| | Duddell | Fracture | 62 |
| | Dutilleux | String Quartet, 'Ainsi la nuit' | 52 |
| | Dvořák | Gypsy Songs, Op 55 B104 – Songs My Mother Taught Me | 35 |
| | | Othello, Op 93 B174 | 35 |
| | | Rusalka – Oh, it's useless; Polonaise; Song to the Moon | 35 |
| | | Symphony No 9, 'From the New World' | 35 |
| | E | | |
| | Elgar | Benedictus, Op 34 No 2 | 79 |
| | | Ecce sacerdos magnus | 79 |
| | | Give unto the Lord, Op 74 | 79 |
| | | Great is the Lord, Op 67 | 79 |
| | | O hearken thou, Op 64 | 79 |
| | | Scenes from the Bavarian Highlands, Op 27 | 79 |
| | | Spanish Serenade, Op 23 | 79 |
| | | Te Deum, Op 34 No 1 | 79 |
| | | Violin Concerto | 106 |
| | Ellerby | Nocturnes and dawn (Patterdale) | 62 |
| | Eötvös | Korrespondenz | 52 |
| | | The Sirens Cycle | 52 |
| | Escaich | Six Études-Chorals | 66 |
| | F | | |
| | Fauré | Barcarolle No 6, Op 70 | 68 |
| | Ferguson | Five Irish Folk Songs, Op 17 | 86 |
| | Ferneyhough | Liber scintillarum | 36 |
| | | Missa brevis | 36 |
| | | Plötzlichkeit | 36 |
| | | La terre est un homme | 36 |
| | Fiorenza | Concertos – for Violin and Strings; for Cello, Two Violins and Basso continuo | 63 |
| | Fitkin | Bob | 62 |
| | Forqueray, A/Forqueray J-B | Complete Works | 52 |
| | Franck | Andantino | 69 |
| | | Fantaisie, Op 15 | 69 |
| | | Final, Op 21 | 69 |
| | | Grande pièce symphonique, Op 17 | 69 |
| | | Pastorale, Op 19 | 69 |
| | | Prélude, fugue et variations, Op 18 | 69 |
| | | Prrière, Op 20 | 69 |
| | | Trois Chorals | 69 |
| | | Trois Pièces | 69 |
| | | Violin Sonata in A major | 107 |
| | Frankel, S | War Paint | 79 |
| | Frescobaldi | Affetti amorosi – Ancidemeti pur; Ardo e taccio il mio mal; Balletto e Ciaccona; Con dolcezza pietate; Corilla danzando sul prato; Così mi disprezzate; Doloroso mio core; Dove ne vai pensiero; Dunque dovrò; Eri già tutta mia; Gagliarda terza; Gioite oh selve; Maddalena alla croce; Non mi negate ohimè; Non vi partite; Oh dolore; Ohimè che fur; Oscure selve; Passacagli; Se l'aura spira; Ti lascio anima mia; Toccata per spinetta, over liuto; Troppo sotto | |
| | | due stelle; Vanne o carta amorosa; Voi partite mio sole | 80 |
| | | Canzon terza a due canti | 44 |
| G | Gabrieli, G | Canzoni et sonate – Canzon III a 6; Canzon V a 7; Canzon VIII a 8; Canzon XVIII a 14; Canzon XXI 'con tre violini'; Sonata XIX a 15; Sonata XX a 22 | 44 |
| | | Canzoni per sonare – Canzon 'La Spiritata' a 4 | 44 |
| | | Sacrae symphoniae – Canzon duodecimi toni a 10 (II); Canzon noni toni a 12; Canzon septimi toni a 8 (II); Sonata octavi toni a 12; Sonata pian e forte a 8 | 44 |
| | Gade | Jalousie | 107 |
| | Gál | Concertino for Cello and String Orchestra, Op 87 | 36 |
| | | Solo Cello Sonata, Op 109a | 36 |
| | | Solo Cello Suite, Op 109b | 36 |
| | Gander | Cold Cadaver with Thirteen Scary Scars | 43 |
| | | Trombone Concerto | 43 |
| | Gershwin | An American in Paris | 47 |
| | Giacomelli | Adriano in Siria – Sinfonia con corni; Mancare, oh Dio, mi sento; Saggio guerriero antico; Vuoi punir l'ingrato amante? | 90 |
| | | Cesare in Egitto – Sinfonia con corni; Alla fastosa, superba Roma; Al vibrar della mia spada; Nel sen mi giubila | 90 |
| | | Gianguir – Sinfonia con tromba; Sinfonia con trombe e oboi | 90 |
| | | Lucio Papirio Dittatore – Dirò quel sangue degno; Spera, sì, presago in petto | 90 |
| | | Merope – Sinfonia con trombe; Fiamma vorace; Sposa, non mi conosci | 90 |
| | | Torbidio nembro freme | 90 |
| | Gilbert | The Flame has Ceased | 62 |
| | Glass | Music with Changing Parts | 53 |
| | Glière | Album Leaves, Op 51 | 57 |
| | | Ballade, Op 4 | 57 |
| | Gluck | Armide – Nous ne trouvons partout que des gouffres ouverts | 97 |
| | | Iphigénie en Tauride – Dieux! Protecteurs de ces affreux rivages | 97 |
| | | Orfeo ed Euridice – Dance of the Furies; Dance of the Blessed Spirits | 47 |
| | | Orphée et Eurydice – Ballet des Ombres heureuse; Danse des Furies; Sinfonie infernale | 97 |
| | Gounod | Sapho – Où suis-je? ... Ô ma lyre immortelle | 97 |
| | Gregson | John's Farewell | 62 |
| | Grossmith | Cups and Saucers | 84 |
| | Gunning | Danse des Fourmis | 62 |
| | Gussago | Sonate a quattro, sei et otto – La Bottana a 4 | 44 |
| | H | | |
| | Handel | Concerti a due cori, HWV332-334 | 36 |
| | | The Choice of Hercules, HWV69 – There the brisk sparkling nectar drain | 86 |
| | | Jephtha, HWV70 – Ye sacred priests – Farewell, ye limpid springs and floods | 86 |
| | | Solomon, HWV67 – Will the sun forget to streak | 86 |
| | | Susanna, HWV66 – Crystal streams in murmurs flowing | 86 |
| | | Theodora, HWV68 – Sinfonia; O thou bright sun ... With darkness deep as is my woe; Symphony of Soft Music; But why art thou disquieted ... O that I on wings could rise | 86 |
| | Harty | A Cradle Song | 86 |
| | | At Easter | 86 |
| | | The Blue Hills | 86 |
| | | The Fiddler of Dooney | 86 |
| | | Flame in the Skies | 86 |
| | | Greek Anthology – Three Sea Prayers | 86 |
| | | Scythe Song | 86 |
| | | The Sea Gypsy | 86 |
| | Haydn | London' Symphonies – No 93; No 94, 'Surprise'; No 95; No 96, 'Miracle'; No 97; No 98; No 99; No 100, 'Military'; No 101, 'Clock'; No 102; No 103, 'Drumroll'; No 104, 'London' | 37 |
| | | Keyboard Sonatas, HobXVI – No 32; No 48 | 67 |
| | | Keyboard Sonatas, HobXVI – No 32; No 40; No 49; No 50 | 69 |
| | | String Quartets – Op 64 & Op 76 | 107 |
| | | Symphony No 88 | 46 |
| | | Violin Concerto, HobVIIa | 47 |
| | Hayes | The Fall of Jericho – Sinfonia; Whom then does Jericho deride; Will she in gates of brass rejoice | 80 |
| | | The Hundredth Psalm | 80 |
| | | Lo! My Shepherd's hand divine | 80 |
| | | Lord, how long wilt thou be angry | 80 |
| | | Lord, thou hast been our refuge | 80 |
| | | O be joyful in God, all ye lands | 80 |
| | | O Worship the Lord | 80 |
| | | Organ Concerto in G | 80 |
| | | The Passions – Overture; Thy wide extended pow'r | 80 |
| | | Save, Lord, and hear us | 80 |
| | | Telemachus – Soon arrives thy fatal hour | 86 |
| | | To God I cry'd with anguish stung | 80 |
| | Hindemith | Concert Music for Strings and Brass, Op 50 | 38 |
| | | Nobilissima Visione – Suite | 38 |
| | | Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes by Carl Maria von Weber | 38 |
| | Howard | Outback | 62 |
| | Hubay | Csárdás No 3 | 107 |
| | | Csárdás No 5 | 107 |
| | J | | |
| | Jaggi | Caral | 43 |
| | Jenkins, J | Complete Four-Part Consort Music | 57 |
| | Joubert | Exequy | 62 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| K | Meyerbeer | Le Prophète | 90 | Rameau | Nachtstücke, Op 23 | 72 | Nachtstücke, Op 8 Nos 1-4 | 43 | | | | | |
| | Keeley | Elegy for John McCabe | 62 | Les Boréades – Entrée de Polymnie | String Quartets, Op 41 – Nos 2 & 3 | 59 | Gloria, RV589 | 84 | | | | | |
| | Kirchner | Tre Poemi | 62 | Dardanus – Voici les tristes lieux | | | Nisi Dominus, RV608 | 84 | | | | | |
| | Kodály | Solo Cello Sonata, Op 8 | 72 | Hippolyte et Aricie – Dieux! Que d'infortunés gémissent en ces lieux!; Je ne te verrai plus!; Qu'ai-je appris? Puissant maître des flots; Quelle plainte en ces lieux m'appelle?; Vous, qui de l'avenir percez la nuit profonde ... Quelle soudaine horreur | | 97 | Nulla in mundo pax sincera, RV630 | 84 | | | | | |
| | Korngold | Sextet, Op 10 (arr Rohde) | 38 | Messe de Requiem sur des thèmes de Castor et Pollux | | 97 | W | Wagner | Parsifal – Act II | 96 | | | |
| | Kreisler | Schön Rosmarin | 107 | Les surprises d'Amour – Loure | | 97 | | Parsifal | 93 | | | | |
| | | Tambourin chinois | 107 | Zoroastre – Ah! Nos fureurs ne sont point vaines; Air grave pour les Esprits infernaux; Épuisons le flanc des tristes victimes ... Ministres, redoutés du plus puissant empire; Quel bonheur! L'Enfer nous seconde | | 97 | | Der Ring des Nibelungen | 96 | | | | |
| | Krufft | Horn Sonata | 62 | | | | | Tannhäuser | 96 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | Tristan und Isolde | 93, 96 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | Wesendonck Lieder | 96 | | | | |
| | L | Lalo | Symphonie espagnole | 106 | Ravel | Ma Mère l'Oye | 41 | Walker | And Will You Walk Beside Me | | | | |
| | | Lappi | Canzon undecima 'La Serafina' a 4 | 44 | Miroirs | | 71 | Down This Lane? | 62 | | | | |
| Liadov | | Two Intermezzi, Op 8 | 72 | Miroirs – Oiseaux tristes | | 68 | Walond | Voluntary in G | 80 | | | | |
| Ligeti | | Solo Cello Sonata | 72 | Pavane pour une infante défunte | | 68 | Warren | In nomine | 62 | | | | |
| Lipkin | | In memoriam John McCabe | 62 | Shéhérazade – ouverture de féerie | | 41 | Weber | Der Freischütz | 96 | | | | |
| Liszt | | Réminiscences de Don Juan | 73 | Sonatine | | 71 | Oberon | 96 | | | | | |
| Lyapunov | | Nocturne, Op 8 | 72 | String Quartet | | 52 | Weinberger | Wallenstein | 95 | | | | |
| M | | Machaut | Comment puet on miex ses maus dire | 80 | Le tombeau de Couperin | 41, 73 | 86 | Weir | Sketches from a Bagpiper's Album | 62 | | | |
| | | | Dame, je vueil endurer | 80 | Rebel | Les élémens – Le cahos | 97 | Widmann | Air | 62 | | | |
| | | | Dame, mon cuer enportez | 80 | Reich | Drumming | 59 | Wieniawski | Violin Concerto No 2 | 107 | | | |
| | | | Dame, vostre dous viaire | 80 | Revueltas | Sensemaya | 47 | Wilson, I | Drive | 62 | | | |
| | | | Dou mal qui m'a longuement | 80 | Ries | Introduction et Polonaise, Op 174 | 41 | Wood, C | At the mid hour of night | 86 | | | |
| | | Douce dame, tant com vivray | 80 | Rimsky-Korsakov | Piano Concertos – No 8, 'Gruss an den Rhein', Op 151; No 9, Op 177 | 41 | At Sea | 86 | | | | | |
| | | Dous amis, oy mon complaint | 80 | The Tsar's Bride – Lyubasha's Song | | 97 | Credhe Lament for Call | 86 | | | | | |
| | | Gais et jolis | 80 | Ruehr | String Quartets – No 1, 'Four Pieces for String Quartet'; No 2, 'Song of the Silkie'; No 3; No 4; No 5, 'Bel canto'; No 6 | 59 | Shall I forget | 86 | | | | | |
| | | Hé! Morel/Dine Amour/Quare non sum mortuus | 80 | S | | | The Outlaw of Loch Lene | 86 | | | | | |
| | | Helas! pour qouy virent/Corde mesto/Libera me | 80 | Saint-Saëns | Samson et Dalila – Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix; Printemps qui commence | 97 | Z | Zelenka | Six Trio Sonatas, ZWV181 | 60 | | | |
| | | Honte, paour, doubtance | 80 | String Quartet – No 1, 'Four Pieces for String Quartet'; No 2, 'Song of the Silkie'; No 3; No 4; No 5, 'Bel canto'; No 6 | 59 | Tartini | | Violin Sonata in G minor 'Devil's Trill' | 106 | Collections | Alfredo Campoli – 'The Bel Canto Violin' – Vols 1-6 | 107 | |
| | | Puis que ma douleur agree | 80 | Salomon | Romance | 47 | | Tchaikovsky | Violin Concerto | | 106, DVD 107 | Stéphane Degout – 'Enfers' | 97 |
| | Riches d'amour | 80 | Salonen | Concert Étude | 62 | Trimble | | Girl's Song | 86 | | Carolyn Dobbin – 'Calen-O' | 86 | |
| | Trop plus est bele/Biauté parée de valour/Je ne sui mie | 80 | Sarasate | Carmen Fantasy | 107 | Green Rain | | 86 | My grief on the sea | | 86 | 'Donaueschinger Musiktage 2016' | 43 |
| MacMillan | After the Tryst (arr Gerard McChrystal) | 62 | Saunders | Skin | 43 | Tüür | | Illuminatio | 42 | | Elena Gaponenko – 'Opus 8' | 72 | |
| Mahler | Symphony No 9 | 38 | Saxton | A Little Prelude for John McCabe | 62 | Symphony No 8 | | 42 | Whistles and Whispers from Uluru | | 42 | Ben Goldscheider; Daniel Hill – 'Debut' | 62 |
| Mancini | Concerto for Recorder, Two Violins, Cello and Basso continuo | 63 | Scarlati, A | Concerto for Recorder, Two Violins, Cello and Basso continuo | 63 | Whistles and Whispers from Uluru | | 42 | | | | Ida Haendel – 'Virtuoso Violinists – Vol 2' | 107 |
| Marshall | Little Passacaglia | 62 | Scarlati, D | Keyboard Sonatas – Kk141; Kk380 | 73 | | | | | | | Daniel Hope; Zurich Chamber Orchestra – 'Journey to Mozart' | 47 |
| Mascagni | Cavalleria rusticana – Voi lo sapete, o mamma | 97 | Schubert | Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D774 (arr Liszt, S558 No 2) | 71 | Venables, P | | Illusions | 60 | | Ruby Hughes – 'Handel's Last Prima donna' | 86 | |
| Massaino | Canzoni per sonare – Canzon No 33 a 8 | 44 | | Piano Sonata No 19, D958 | 71 | Klaviertrio im Geiste | | 60 | Metamorphoses after Britten | | 60 | McKenzie Sawers Duo – 'After the Tryst' | 62 |
| Massenet | Werther – Werther ... Je vous écris de ma petite chambre (Letter Aria) | 97 | | Sei mir gegrüsst, D741 (arr Liszt, S558 No 1) | 71 | Numbers 76-80 | | 60 | Numbers 91-95 | | 60 | Linda Merrick – 'A Garland for John McCabe' | 62 |
| Matthews, D | Chaconne | 62 | | Six Moments musicaux, D780 | 71 | The Revenge of Miguel Cotto | 60 | | | | Monteverdi Choir – 'In Rehearsal' | 46 | |
| McDowall | Mein blaues Klavier | 62 | | String Quartets – complete | 107 | | | | | David Oistrakh – 'Virtuoso Violinists – Vol 1' | 107 | | |
| Medtner | Two Fairy Tales, Op 8 | 72 | | String Quintet in C major | 107 | | | | | Andrés Orozco-Estrada – 'Music of the Americas' | 47 | | |
| Mendelssohn | Symphonies – No 4, 'Italian'; No 5, 'Reformation' | 39 | | Winter Journey (Winterreise) | 82 | | | | | Anita Rachvelishvili | 97 | | |
| | Violin Concerto in E minor | 106 | | | | | | | | James Rhodes – 'Fire On All Sides' | 72 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | La Ritirata – 'Neapolitan Concertos' | 63 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Royal Academy of Music and Juilliard School Brass – 'Gabrieli for Brass' | 44 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Soliazio Ensemble – 'En seumeillant' | 86 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Ryutaro Suzuki – 'Piano' | 73 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Wendy Tworek – 'The Danish Violin Wizard' | 107 | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Vienna Konzerthaus Quartet – 'The Art of Vienna Konzerthaus Quartet' | 107 | | |

Manuel Lobo Antunes

Portugal's Ambassador to the United Kingdom shares his insights both into his own musical journey, and into that of his country

Cultural life when I grew up was very limited, and the choice and opportunities were not so great. We had a national symphony orchestra which was sponsored by the state. But classical music, and classical music education, was for the bourgeoisie and those who could afford it. But then a phenomenon happened, which was the Gulbenkian Foundation. It was created by the fortune left to the Portuguese state by a billionaire called Calouste Gulbenkian, and it acted in many ways like a second ministry of culture, and was particularly focused on arts and music. It built its own auditorium and created its own orchestra and ballet company. This, together with the social and economic changes following the democratic revolution of 1974, radically changed the musical panorama of Portugal. We had the Opera of St Carlos during the time of the dictatorship – but it was for a small, educated, rich elite. What Gulbenkian did was to open music to the general public – to those who had no opportunity to go to St Carlos, or to go to a concert. More people could now listen to and know about music. It was a deep and profound transformation.

I was lucky enough to have a father who had many intellectual interests, who was a big reader, and who loved music, poetry and literature, and who was willing to share his enthusiasms with his six children. For instance at most of our dinners he would recite poetry. What I know, I owe to him.

I'm a little like that, I like to share my enthusiasms, and to transmit what I know to others. I always try to put music in its cultural context – in its time. It's important for people to understand the difference between Romanticism, Classicism, why Mozart is different to Beethoven. Music is a symbol of its time, like architecture, like sculpture, like painting, and this to me is absolutely fundamental. All artistic tendencies, as they develop, represent their time. They represent a transformation that happened, they represent progress.

You need to listen a lot to understand music. More and more I think about music as I see a painting, that everything has a meaning – and the process of trying to learn why, for example, those violins are there, or why the trumpet comes in now, gives me great pleasure. I've listened to music for many years now, but this sensation, this discovery, is not a very old one for me – it took years for me to understand what is good and what is bad. Though of course there is always a personal subjective element which is our own taste and own sensitivity.

Portugal's cultural history suffers from a very simple geographical situation – we were not at the centre of Europe, we were not where things crossed, so we always had to look for things, rather than things coming to us. Though Liszt



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Arcadi Volodos *pf*

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My choice is often to do with my state of mind – if I'm sad I go for Brahms.

once gave a recital in Lisbon which was an absolute phenomenon! Secondly, we'd had the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 which destroyed 90 per cent of our archives. So our heritage of scores was lost completely – this affected a very interesting composer, Carlos Seixas, who had a tremendous output, most of which was destroyed. And we had a very conservative court – composers were not sent to Austria, or to Germany, they were sent to Italy, so were very much Italianized, and so not very original – they were there to repeat and to imitate.

Portugal's great art is poetry, but here the problem is language. To translate poetry is tricky. For me it is a great pity that foreigners cannot read our poetry, and understand its beauty, its message, its soul, its imagination and its life.

The earliest I can go musically without feeling bored is Monteverdi, though I like some recorded chant as well. And, with exceptions, my limit is Shostakovich, who was an absolute genius – though I can listen to Philip Glass here and there, or Stockhausen, or Berg. Though that's a very wide range! 

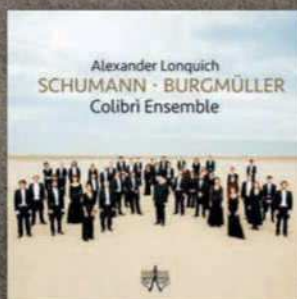
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